

THE ROLE OF THE WIZARD IN SCOTTISH AND ICELANDIC FOLK LEGEND

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ABSTRACT

My thesis is a comparison of the wizard figure in Scottish and Icelandic folk legends. It begins with a study of the international wizard tradition. The first chapter concerns two wizards, the Rev. Sæmundur Sigfússon of Iceland and the Scottish wizard Master Michael Scot. It includes brief biographies of the historical characters and some comments concerning the manner in which the first gained their reputations as wizards. In this chapter I also consider the migratory legend ML 300: "Escape from the Black School", ML 3020: "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book", and ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil". I compare the magic practised in these legends with similar historical practices and beliefs.

I then consider the respective development of the legends in Scotland and Iceland. Social and historical influences are considered and the legends are compared with similar traditions in other countries. Special attention is given to the changes which the legends underwent.

Finally I consider the witch tradition and the course of the witchcraft trials in either country, and their influence on popular beliefs.

I declare that this thesis was composed by me, and that it is a product of my own original and independent research.

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INTRODUCTION

At some time around the year 1540 in the South West of Germany a man who had called himself "Master George Sabellicus, the younger Faust" apparently died. At least there are no further recorded references describing him as still living after that date. About this time accounts concerning him change their tone in another respect as well. George Faust, or simply Faust as he was often known, had claimed to be the greatest of all philosophers, "the second magus". Contemporary accounts, on the other hand, described him as "a vagabond, a babbler and a rogue". (Palmer and More 1936 p.83-84) After his death, however, his reputation increased, even if it did not actually improve. Within a decade of his death he was described as a wizard who summoned the Devil and commanded him to perform magic.

As Faust's reputation became more popular new legends were attached to his name. Many of these were not original. Often they had been previously recorded elsewhere about other wizards, or else they continued to circulate as anecdotes concerning unnamed wandering scholars. One early account told how Faust had once summoned a demon to torment a certain monastery where the monks had refused to put him up for the night. One version of this legend then added the comment that another wandering scholar had done the same thing at an abbey. (Ibid. p.104-105) Another account described how Simon Magus had once tried to fly up to heaven carried by invisible Demons then commented that "Faust also tried this". (Ibid. p.99)

Popular opinion decided which stories would survive. Those which were considered relevant or interesting were remembered and repeated. Those which were uninteresting were forgotten. In this way the legends came to reflect the attitudes and concerns of the time. The South West of Germany in the sixteenth century was a major centre of the

witchcraft trials. Like the witches Faust was said to have sold his soul to the Devil, agreeing to renounce his baptism and become an enemy to all Christian people. Faust was unusual in that his motive was neither greed nor spite, but a desire for greater knowledge. This may have reflected the church's response to the Humanist movement of that time, and the renewed interest in secular education. As this process continued the character of Faust became increasingly stereotyped. George Sabellicus was eventually forgotten. In 1563 his first name was even changed from the German "Jörg" to "Johann" or John.

These legends were probably circulated in the universities where Faust was evidently a popular figure. As a result they are surprisingly well documented. The earliest accounts were recorded as anecdotes in letters or sermons and chronicles and it is apparent that the authors expected Faust's name to be recognized. These accounts often have a strong moral tone, and the reader is frequently reminded that for what Faust had done he was damned. The first known manuscript collection of the Faust legend was compiled in 1570. Other manuscripts followed and the first printed book was published by Johann Spies in 1587, less than fifty years after Faust's death. This ran into several editions, was enlarged and translated into English, French and Dutch. (Ibid. p.129-131)

Toward the end of the book there is another change of tone. The moral nature of the early legends is lost, and Faust is presented as a trickster figure, using his magic to entertain at feasts and to play practical jokes on others. In one chapter he caused a pair of antlers to appear on a knight who was sleeping with his head out of an open window so that the knight could not pull his head back in until the antlers were removed. (ch. 30) In another chapter he sold a horse which turned into a bundle of straws when the new owner tried to ride it across running water. (ch. 34) (Ibid. p.194-

227) This section has a very anecdotal quality, and many of the accounts have since been recorded about other wizards. It is possible that Spies was drawing on a popular tradition which had not been reflected in the early sources. In 1591 it was remarked that Faust had "acquired through his wonderful tricks and diabolical enchantments such a celebrated name that among the common people there can hardly be found anyone who is not able to recount some instances of his art." (Ibid. p.123)

Faust was not the only legendary wizard of the time, nor was he the first, although he has become the best known. His legend was part of a tradition that included such figures as the Tyrolean Dr. Theophrastus¹ and Ziito of Bohemia². This tradition had developed through the middle ages and appears to have reached the peak of its popularity around the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. At about this same time similar legends were being told in the North of Europe about such figures as the Rev. Peter Dass of Norway. Unlike Faust these Northern wizards have received little attention outside their own countries, but the legends told about them reflect a very different attitude towards magic. Typically they were not said to have sold their souls to the Devil, and they were generally portrayed as benevolent, or at least ambiguous, figures. This portrayal is especially surprising coming from the same period as the witchcraft trials, when magic was evidently believed in and severely condemned.

It would not be possible to provide a complete survey of the Northern European wizard tradition. The legends varied over time and from each country to the next, and a great deal of the material is no doubt lost. For the purpose of this present study the material will be limited to those legends

¹ Phillipus Auroleus Peracelsus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541).

² From the court of King Wenceslaus (1361-1419).

collected in Iceland and Scotland, representing respectively the Nordic and Anglo-Celtic worlds. Both Scotland and Iceland are located in the North Atlantic ocean, over which they have shared communication and trade with the rest of Scandinavia and the British Isles. As a result they share many of the same legends. In each country, however, the legends have developed differently as a result of different cultural and historical influences.

Iceland was first settled by Norsemen in the year 874. It lost its independence to Norway in 1262, but retained its own judicial and legislative administrations. In 1380 Norway and Denmark were united under one crown, and in 1536, after the Danish war of succession, Norway was declared to be a province of Denmark. In 1537 the Reformation was introduced throughout the Danish kingdom. This was met with opposition in Iceland, on both religious and political grounds. All opposition ended in 1550 when Jón Arason, the last native Catholic bishop in Iceland, was beheaded. (Johannesson 1975 p.44) From the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries Danish merchants enjoyed a trade monopoly in Iceland, and the Icelanders had little contact with the rest of Europe. Throughout this period Iceland can be regarded as a fairly homogenous and isolated culture.

Scotland, in contrast, can be divided into the Gaelic speaking Highlands and Islands, and the Anglo-Saxon Lowlands. Throughout most of their histories these have constituted two distinct linguistic, cultural and, at times, effectively separate political regions. However for the purpose of this study Scotland will be treated as a single region. The Reformation reached Scotland in 1559. In 1603 Scotland was united with England under one crown; the parliaments were united a century later in 1707 forming the United Kingdom. In 1637 the Anglican prayer book was introduced to Scotland reviving many of the Catholic forms. This was opposed by many Scotsmen, who formed a National Covenant. The

Covenanters rose to power in the Scottish parliament, and there followed more than a century of civil war between the various religious and political factions.

It was during this post-Reformation period that the witchcraft trials took place in either country. In both countries they were imported from abroad, coincidentally in both cases from Denmark, and they were promoted by the educated civil and ecclesiastical authorities. In each country, however, the trials developed very differently. In Scotland the course of the trials followed closely the continental model and developed into full scale witch hunts. There are over three thousand witch trials from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries recorded in the Source Book of Scottish Witchcraft, (Larner, Lee and McLachlan 1978) and Christina Larner has estimated that "something over a thousand" people were executed. (Larner 1981 p.63) Of these, as in the rest of Europe, roughly eighty percent were women. In Iceland the trials were much milder. Over the course of sixty years in the seventeenth century there were roughly one hundred and twenty accusations out of which only twenty three led to execution. Unlike the pattern in Scotland of these only ten women were accused of witchcraft, and all but one of those executed were men.

The Icelandic wizard legends were first collected at the end of the seventeenth century by Jón Eggertsson and Árni Magnusson. In the nineteenth century Jón Árnason compiled his three volume collection of Icelandic folklore, which was later expanded to six volumes, containing roughly three hundred pages of legends concerning specific named wizards. This quantity of material requires that some selection be made. Researchers have tended to restrict their studies to a small number of wizards regarded as representative of the larger tradition, and to select specific legends concerning these wizards apparently at random. This imposes certain subjective criteria concerning the nature of a typical wizard

and a representative legend. Any such selection based on predetermined criteria will inevitably prejudice the conclusions. For the purpose of this study the selection will be restricted, for the most part, only to those legends which have been recorded in more than one variant. In cases where a recurrent motif has not been found in any consistent legend type an example will be chosen which is both brief and representative of that motif. The few exceptions made to this rule will be noted in the text.

In Scotland fewer legends have been recorded and as a result all of the available material can be considered. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Sir Walter Scott helped to promote the Lowland wizard Michael Scot among literary circles, and several of the legends told about him began to appear in printed sources about this time. A few other wizards appeared in the Lowlands, and towards the end of the century collectors recorded a number of legends concerning wizards from the Highlands as well. Many of these legends appear in multiple variants, and it is unlikely that additional collection would produce substantially different material.

In neither Scotland nor Iceland can the sources be regarded as entirely reliable. Many of the Scottish legends appeared as either short summaries or literary adaptations of the legends. In some cases details may have been changed as well. In one legend recorded in Strathclyde by John Mitchell and John Dickie the wizard Michael Scot was said to have caused all of the chimney pots in Rome to fall down. (Mitchell and Dickie 1839 p.290) This is consistent with the common practice of story tellers to describe events in terms familiar to their audience. In the variant of this legend recorded by Sir Walter Scott the wizard "threw down three of the towers of the palace." (Scott 1820 p.184) In this case Scott may have been adapting his sources to match the expectations of a more literate audience.

In Iceland Jón Árnason often edited his sources combining different variants of the same legend, or attaching alternate endings to a single account. For example Árni Magnusson recorded a number of fragments referring to well known legends: "*Item* there was no schoolmaster to be seen at the Black School, but anything that the students wanted to know in the evening would be available written in books in the morning, or it would be written on the wall ... *Item* over the door of the Black School inside it was written: In may you go; your soul is lost." (Einarsson 1955 p.45) Árnason inserted these two items into a full account of the Black School legend, without any comment. (Árnason 1822 I p.469) In others cases short legends have been compiled out of such fragments.

In 1874 Walter Gregor described the practice of story telling in a farm kitchen in the North East of Scotland. This was an informal activity in the evening when the family was gathered together engaged in domestic chores. "At one end of the hearth sat the father, and at the other the mother. Between the two sat the family, and it might be a servant or two, for all were on a footing of equality, the servant being a neighbour's son or daughter of exactly the same rank and means. All were busy... If there were children in the family at school, there was silence or but little conversation, for lessons were being prepared... When the school books were laid aside, the song and the ballad and the story began." (Gregor 1874 p.22-23) He commented that legends of the supernatural were common, and referred directly to two of the legends in this study. For some of the Icelandic material, and a few of the Scottish legends, the names of the storytellers have been recorded. Other than this there is no detailed information on the age or gender of a typical storyteller or the specific conditions under which a particular legend might be told. This makes any detailed contextual study of the legends impossible.

To a certain extent the methods which can be applied to this study have been determined by the material. In neither country can our sources be regarded as accurate transcriptions of the oral tradition, and they can not be used to study the story teller's style. In many cases we can not rely on the form of the legends as they have been recorded and they cannot be used as a reliable basis for a structural analysis. In this study I will be concerned with their content. In order to avoid the possibility of distortions in the texts whenever possible multiple variants will be considered and the emphasis will be placed on their recurrent motifs. My purpose in doing this will not be to construct an ideal variant of the legend. The focus of this study will be on the motifs themselves. In some cases groups of legends sharing common features will be contrasted with similar traditions from other cultures.

I will begin by studying the international wizard tradition. The first chapter will concern two of the earliest wizards in this study, the Rev. Sæmundur Sigfússon from Iceland and the Scottish wizard Master Michael Scot. Both of these characters are based on historical figures, respectively from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. I will give brief summaries of their biographies as well as any early accounts recorded concerning either of them. From this some preliminary conclusions can be drawn concerning the manner in which they first gained their reputations as wizards. In this chapter I will also consider the migratory legends, ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School", ML 3020: "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book", and ML 3025: "Carried By the Devil", from Reidar Th. Christiansen's index The Migratory Legends. The magic practised in these legends will be compared with similar historical practices and beliefs.

Other characters or motifs which appear in the legends will be considered, such as books of magic and the Devil, and the wizard's relationship with these motifs will be

established. If the clever wizard outwits the foolish Devil then this creates a very different relationship than if he were to sell the Devil his soul. This method follows much the same process in which any member of the storytelling community would have become familiar with the role of the wizard, by encountering a number of legends and deriving from them certain common traits. This method is not expected to produce any dramatic conclusions, only general observations and cumulative arguments. I will not propose any interpretation of the legends which could not be deduced by any member of the storytelling audience of average intelligence with a little thought.

The next two chapters will consider the development of the wizard tradition respectively in Scotland and Iceland. Social and historical influences will be considered and the legends will be compared with traditions in other cultures in order to highlight features which might otherwise not be noticed. Special attention will be given to the changes which the tradition has undergone, both considering the motifs which were attached to the wizard legends and those features of the international tradition which were omitted or altered. The purpose of this study will be to reconstruct the attitudes and beliefs common in the community in which the legends were preserved and recorded. For this purpose it is not necessary to assume that every member believed equally in the accuracy of the legends, only that the legends made sense to their audience, that they reflect a common world view.

The final chapter will concern the witch tradition and the witchcraft trials. I will begin by making some general observations concerning the native beliefs in either country concerning witches or female magicians prior to the witchcraft trials. I will then consider the course of the trials in either country, with special emphasis given to the evidence of popular beliefs. Finally I will examine the

effect of the witchcraft trials on popular beliefs and attitudes toward magic. In this section I will consider the two countries separately and no attempt will be made to compare their respective traditions.

In my conclusions I will outline the development of the wizard tradition, and summarize the major points from the chapters in an organized and coherent manner.

Before continuing further it would be useful to define some of the terminology which is to be used.

Throughout this study reference will be made to migratory legends and tale-types. A tale-type (indicated by AT referring to Aarne-Thompson) is a group of tales following roughly the same outline found in The Types of the Folk-tale by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson. The Migratory Legends (indicated by ML) was an extension on the tale-type index. In this study the term "migratory legend" will be used to describe any legend which has been found in more than one country regardless of whether it has been recorded either by Christiansen or in the tale-type index.

In many cases Christiansen admitted that "There is no definite epic pattern and the principal element is the motif rather than the story." (See ML 3050 and 3055.) In practice there are often no clear divisions between the types. Variants of the migratory legend ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil" can be virtually identical to some variants of ML 5005: "Journey with a Troll". Christiansen divided these legends according to whether the supernatural being was identified as the Devil or a troll. For the purpose of this study the division will be made according to the presence or absence of a wizard in the legend. This division is functional, it is artificial, and I recognize that another study would make a different division.

The word "legend" will be given two meanings. It will be used to describe a group of tales told about a single

historical figure, such as the legend of Michael Scot. It will also be used to refer to a group of such tales all following the same legend-type, or containing the same central motifs, such as the Black School legend. "Tradition" will describe a group of legends sharing a specified common feature occurring within a particular period or area, such as the nineteenth century Scottish wizard tradition. Any one specific tale will be an "account", especially if it is recorded as part of a longer literary work. In practice the terms "legend" and "account" will often overlap, and they will often be used interchangeably to avoid repetition in the text. The word "variant" will describe different accounts belonging to the same legend-type. "Parallel" will describe similar legends or beliefs recorded in different countries. Unlike "variant" use of the word "parallel" will not imply any direct relationship between the legends.

The International Wizard Tradition

On the basis that it seems best to start at the beginning the first of the wizards to be discussed in this study is the Icelandic priest Sæmundur Sigfússon who lived around the turn of the twelfth century. According to the Annals Sæmundur was born in the year 1056 which makes him the oldest of the Icelandic wizards. He was sent abroad to study at a young age. This was not unusual at that time as there were no schools in Iceland; however Sæmundur was apparently the first Icelfander to be educated in France. He returned to Iceland around the year 1077 and was ordained to the ministry. Once home Sæmundur settled on his patrimony at Oddi in the south of Iceland and took over the church there which he dedicated to St. Nicholas, although other sources suggest that he may have built this church himself. (Hermannsson 1932 p.5-6)

In the Sagas Sæmundur appears principally in genealogies. He is presented as a prominent and powerful chieftain who was active in the political and intellectual life of his country. He was instrumental in passing the law of tithes and the ecclesiastical law of 1125, both extending and strengthening the authority of the church. Through his efforts he succeeded in raising his family to a position of wealth and prestige which it was to enjoy for centuries and established Oddi as the foremost centre of education in Iceland. Sæmundur is credited with having written a lost History of the Kings of Norway in Latin. If this was the case then he was the first history writer in Iceland. By the thirteenth century he was known as Sæmundur fróði, "the Wise". (Ibid. p.7-9) (The first vernacular history writer in Iceland was Ari "fróði".) Sæmundur was also incorrectly credited with having written the Poetic Edda and the poem Sólurljóð, which, according to tradition, he composed posthumously and recited while sitting up in his coffin.

(Arnason I 1954 p.475¹) The Edda is a collection of old Norse myths and legends and this association with Sæmundur suggests that he was known to have an interest in the ancient north. The term "fróði" generally referred to a knowledge of Norse history and literature, and was never applied to foreign learning alone. (Hermannsson 1932 p.33) Sæmundur died on the 22nd of May 1133.

The earliest recorded account concerning Sæmundur the Wise is found in Jóns Saga Helga (XV-XVI) or "the Saga of Saint Jón". Jóns Saga was originally written in Latin by the monk Gunnlaugur Leifsson at the beginning of the thirteenth century, probably to commemorate the canonization of Bishop Jón Ögmundsson in the year 1200. This version has since been lost, but it had been translated into Icelandic probably in the same century. The saga now survives in Icelandic in two versions, only one of which contains the full legend of Sæmundur. Both accounts agree that Sæmundur had been abroad for long time and that nothing was known about him in Iceland. However St. Jón got news of Sæmundur while travelling in the south and brought him back to his home and family. In the full version we are told that Sæmundur had been studying astrology with a certain excellent master, and that he had forgotten everything that he had known in his youth, including his own Christian name. Jón visited Sæmundur, who then called himself Kollr, and managed to remind him of childhood and his own true identity. Sæmundur then agreed to return to Iceland with Jón, but he didn't believe that his master would let him leave. This would be a problem since the master was an expert in astrology and could see wherever Sæmundur went by following his star.

After their discussion Sæmundur took Jón to meet his master. He received him well. Jón was

¹ From a transcript collected by Guðbrand Vigfússon "in an unknown hand from the seventeenth century"

there for a while, until one dark night they made their escape. The weather was thick with clouds and they travelled all night and the next day. When the master missed them there was a search, but they couldn't be found. The next night all of the stars could be seen. Then the master saw where they were going and quickly went after them.

Sæmundur looked in the sky and said, "My master is on his way and sees where we're going."

Jón said, "What can we do?"

Sæmundur answered, "We will act quickly. Take a shoe off my foot, fill it with water and set it on my head." He did so.

Now concerning the wise man, he looked in the heavens and said, "This is bad tidings. The foreigner, Jón, has drowned my fosterson Kollr since there is water around his star," and he went home again.

Jón and Sæmundur went on their way that night and the next day. Now again concerning the wise man, the next night he observed the order of the stars and saw Sæmundur's star pass over him alive and he went after them.

Sæmundur said, "The master astrologer is coming again and more action is needed. Take my shoe off my foot again and take my knife out of the sheath. Cut my calf and fill the shoe with blood and set it on my crown." Jón did so.

Then the master could again see Sæmundur's star and he said, "There is now blood about Kollr's star, and now it is sure that the foreigner has killed him." He turned back along his way, but Sæmundur and St. Jón continued on their road.

There is this to say that when the wise master came home he tried his art again and again saw Sæmundur's star and said, "My apprentice, Kollr, is still alive and that's good, but I've taught him enough since he now beats me at astronomy and his tricks. They'll go safe and sound since I've no way to stop their departure. This Jón will be very fortunate, and men will long profit from his luck."

The legend closely resembles another legend concerning a scholar named Gerbert, who later became Pope Sylvester II (999-1003), which had appeared about a century earlier in William of Malmesbury's Gesta Regum Anglorum. Like Sæmundur the Wise Gerbert was well known for his intelligence and his education. He had founded a school in France and was tutor

to the Emperor Otto III. As Pope Sylvester II he was involved with Otto III in a failed political renovation of the church organization, a fact which earned them both powerful enemies among the major Italian families. This may have been a factor in Gerbert's later reputation as a magician, and accusations that he had sold his soul to the Devil. According to the account in William's history Gerbert had studied astrology and "the art of calling up spirits from Hell" from a Saracen philosopher in Spain. The Saracen had a book containing the knowledge of his whole art which he refused to show to Gerbert. With the aid of the Saracen's daughter, whom he had seduced, Gerbert stole the book and fled. The Saracen then set out after him by following the direction of the stars. Gerbert realized that he was being pursued and hid from the Saracen by hanging under a wooden bridge touching neither earth nor water. The Saracen returned home, but Gerbert continued on his way and came to a sea-coast. There he summoned the Devil and offered to sell him his soul if the Devil would transport him to the opposite coast. This was accordingly done and William uses this pact with the Devil to explain Gerbert's later reputation and successes in life. (*William 1939* p. 150-152)

The method which Gerbert used to hide from the Saracen in this legend differs from the means employed by Sæmundur in Jóns Saga and unlike Sæmundur, Gerbert escapes alone, although with the help of the Saracen's daughter. However the basic idea of a student of magic escaping from his master and the means of pursuit by studying the movement of the stars remains the same. The similarities between these two legends was first noticed by Halldór Hermannsson. He suggested that Sæmundur may himself have first brought the legend of Gerbert to Iceland. Having studied in France he would have been familiar with Gerbert's reputation, and such exotic tales from abroad would have been welcome on his return to Iceland. Over time, through retelling, certain

details were forgotten or changed. Since Gerbert would not have been well known in Iceland at this time his name was soon forgotten and Sæmundur was made the hero of the legend. (Hermannsson 1932 p.54) The theft of the book of magic and the Saracen's daughter were entirely omitted, and Sæmundur was said to have been simply escaping from his master. This may have reflected a much milder attitude towards magic in Iceland than elsewhere. It should be noted that while Gerbert was said to have learned demonology, the art of summoning demons, Sæmundur practised only simple tricks with astrology, and Sæmundur was not said to have sold his soul to the Devil.

This theory could be said to explain how Sæmundur first gained his reputation as a wizard, but it does not explain St. Jón's role or how he became involved in the legend. Jón is credited with having rescued Sæmundur, and the school master praises his luck, but it was Sæmundur's knowledge and skill which saved them both from pursuit. The recurrent motif of Sæmundur instructing Jón on the necessary actions may simply have been a result of the saga writer's preference for dialogue over description. Recently Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson has revived Hermannsson's suggestion. He has argued that the full account of Sæmundur's escape was a late addition to Jóns saga. It contains several long awkward sentences which would have sounded clumsy in spoken Icelandic, and is evidently a literary product. Aðalsteinsson claims that the shorter version of Jóns Saga, which states only that Jón brought Sæmundur back to Iceland, represents an older tradition from the thirteenth century. A fourteenth century compiler then combined this account with a popular legend of how Sæmundur had escaped from his master, which may have closely followed the legend of Gerbert's escape. (Aðalsteinsson 1993 p.13)

Unfortunately this argument is based on an incorrect dating of the text. Until recently the shorter version of

Jóns Saga was believed to be older as Aðalsteinsson claims; however, the long awkward sentences in the full account show clear signs of being a direct translation from the Latin original. In which case the long version of Jóns Saga containing the legend of Sæmundur's escape from his master is closer to Gunnlaugur Leifsson's original. In the shorter version the grammar and prose have been edited to conform to vernacular Icelandic usage and the more fantastic accounts, such as the legend of Sæmundur's escape, have been omitted. (Jónsson 1981 I p.ii) The long version of the legend can not have been influenced by the account in the short version of Jóns Saga as Aðalsteinsson suggests, since the long version containing the legend was composed first and the short version was derived from it.

This approach to the material makes the mistake of relying too heavily on written sources. Aðalsteinsson even suggests that William of Malmesbury's history had been known to the saga writer who composed the story of Sæmundur's escape. There is, in fact, no evidence to support this suggestion. The earliest recorded reference to Gerbert in Icelandic, from the late nineteenth century, only states that he was a monk who sold his soul to the Devil, and does not include the story of his escape from the Saracen. (Einarsson 1955 p.civ) While the legend of Sæmundur's escape and the account in William's history are evidently related there is no reason to suggest a direct connection. It is much more likely that the both William and Gunnlaugur were drawing separately from a common oral tradition, and that several variants of this legend have been told at different times in different places about several different individuals. The use of such oral legends was a common practice in medieval history writing. William repeated another legend about Gerbert which has also been told about Virgil (Kieckhefer 1989 p.144), and Gunnlaugur recorded an account about St. Jón which resembles the story of Caedmon from Bede's Historia

Ecclesiastica (book 4, XXIV).

It is unlikely that Gunnlaugur would have included the legend of Sæmundur's escape in the original version of Jóns Saga if St. Jón did not already appear in the account, although he may have been adapting his sources for use in a hagiographic work. In an earlier version of the legend Jón could have played a more or less prominent role. He may even have appeared as a fellow student and escaped together with Sæmundur. As bishop at Skálholt Jón was known to have fought aggressively against the use of "magic, sorcery, illusionary juggling and stood against all evil old lore with all his might and main". A later passage in the saga, however, makes it clear that what he opposed was the "evil remains of heathen tradition which were not uprooted from the Godly field while Christianity was young". (Jónsson 1981 p.37+38) In the thirteenth century when Jóns Saga was written astrology was not generally condemned nor regarded as a form of magic; its study and practice was part of every educated person's world view. While the "illusionary juggling" in this legend may not have been appropriate behaviour for a saint the practice of astrology would not have been inconsistent with an opposition to pagan magic.

Another, more extended, variant of this legend was recorded by Árni Magnusson in the seventeenth century. In this account Sæmundur was said to have been studying at the Devil's Black School.

The rules in the school were that everyone who came there should study for three years. All of the students from the same year would leave at the same time, and the Devil would claim the last to go out. So lots would be drawn to decide who would go last. Sæmundur was chosen to go last more than once, and was there longer than usual.

It so happened that Bishop Jón passed by on his way to Rome. He learned that Sæmundur was in the Black School and how things were, so he went in and talked to Sæmundur and offered to help him out if he would then go to Iceland and keep a Christian

life. Sæmundur agreed to those terms. Bishop Jón had Sæmundur go before him and he had his coat loose over his shoulders. When Jón went out a hand came up out of the floor and gripped the coat and took it, but Jón went out.

After that the Devil came to Sæmundur and made a contract with him that if Sæmundur could hide for three nights then he would be free, otherwise the Devil would own him. The first night Sæmundur hid under a stream bed in the water and earth, and the Devil thought he had been drowned. The next night Sæmundur hid himself in the bottom of a boat floating at sea, and the Devil thought that the water had carried him out to sea. The third night Sæmundur had himself covered in consecrated earth, and the Devil thought that he'd washed ashore and been buried in a churchyard where the Devil hadn't the courage to look.

This was all done on the advice of Bishop Jón. (Einarsson 1955 p.39-40²)

St. Jón plays a much more prominent role in this account. He helps Sæmundur to escape and then advises him on how to evade pursuit. The motif of hiding through deception is consistent with the account in Jóns Saga, although the means of deception are different. This motif occurs frequently in the sagas.³ The motif of Sæmundur hiding from the Devil occurs in another short legend from the seventeenth century. "Sæmundur and the Devil played hide and seek. The Devil hid under the turf in the mud. Sæmundur stepped on the turf so the Devil had to give himself up. Sæmundur hid in the pulpit where the Devil couldn't bear to look." (Einarsson 1955 p.47⁴) This motif has been attached to the migratory legend ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School". This legend has also been recorded in Scotland, Norway and in another seventeenth century account from Germany. In his index The

² This legend was collected by Árni Magnússon from Bishop Björn Þorleifsson of Hólar

³ See p.140

⁴ Recorded by Árni Magnússon

Migratory Legends Reidar Th. Christiansen listed several different methods of escaping from the Devil. (Einarsson 1955 p.cxi) The most common method, which occurs in the German variant, is for the student to trick the Devil into taking his shadow instead of his soul. This motif occurs in an Icelandic variant of this legend from the nineteenth century.

When Sæmundur the Wise went up the steps and out the door of the Black School the sun shone against him and cast his shadow on the wall. When the Devil tried to take him Sæmundur said, "I'm not the last. Don't you see the one behind me?" The Devil then grabbed the shadow thinking that it was a man, and Sæmundur escaped and slammed the door at his heel. From that time on Sæmundur had no shadow as the Devil never let his shadow go. (Árnason 1954 I p.475-476⁵)

This is probably the original source for the motif in which St. Jón lost his coat. Bjarni Einarsson has pointed out that the image of a magician losing his shadow is both striking and easily remembered, and it is unlikely that the story teller had simply forgotten this motif. (Einarsson 1955 p.cxii) It is more probable that the legend was deliberately altered to make it seem more realistic.

The account in Jóns Saga does not identify the school master as the Devil, and variants of this legend outside Iceland do not include the motif of hiding from the Devil. These two episodes would have been easily combined since both deal with the common theme of a student of magic escaping from his master.⁶ Both of these motifs have been recorded,

⁵ Recorded by Magnús Grimsson "from a popular account in Borgarfjórð"

⁶ There may have been a direct relationship between this motif and the legend in Jóns Saga. In the international tale-type AT 329: "Hiding from the Devil" the hero has to hide three times from the Devil. In this tale the Devil has a magic window which he can use to see where the hero goes,

either as separate legends or combined into a single account. In one variant from the nineteenth century Sæmundur was advised on how to escape and aided by Bogi Einarsson, (Árnason I 1954 p.477⁷) in another he escaped along with a fellow student named "Christophor". (Árnason I 1954 p.478⁸) A variant from the seventeenth century claimed that Sæmundur attended the Black School along with Ari "fróði" and that they both escaped together. (Einarsson 1955 p.xcviii) The Rev. Hálfðan and Kálfur Árnason were also said to have attended the Black School with Sæmundur. (Árnason 1954 I p.475-476) St. Jón does not appear in any of these variants, but they support the assertion made earlier that he may have played a more prominent role in Gunnlaugur's oral source for the legend.

The final episode from the legend about Gerbert in which he sold his soul to the Devil has also been recorded in the nineteenth century as a separate legend concerning Sæmundur. It's said that when Sæmundur, Hálfðan and Kálfur came out of the Black School the church at Oddi had no priest. The King of Norway then offered the position to whomever could get there first.

Then Sæmundur went and called on the Devil and said, "Swim with me now to Iceland, and if you can get me there without getting my coat wet in the sea then you can have my soul." The Devil agreed and turned himself into a seal and went off with Sæmundur on his back. On the way Sæmundur read from the psalter. After a little

analogous to the stars used by the schoolmaster. A variant of this tale-type from France, AT 329 A, is titled "Man gives (sells) his shadow to the Devil" Unfortunately there is no summary of this tale given in the Types of the Folk-Tale. (Aarne and Thompson 1961)

⁷ Told by Jón Þorðarson, a student from Klausturhóll (later priest at Auðkúla).

⁸ Recorded by Þorstein Þórarinnsson "from the east in Múlaarsýsla district"

time they came to Iceland. Sæmundur then hit the Devil over the head with the psalter so that he sank, and Sæmundur got wet and swam to shore. In this way the Devil lost the bargain, and Sæmundur got Oddi. (Árnason I 1954 p.478⁹)

A brief variant of this legend was recorded in the seventeenth century without any reference to the Black School nor to Sæmundur obtaining the parish at Oddi. (Einarsson 1955 p.46) Iceland did not become part of the Norwegian kingdom until 1262 and the King would not have had the authority to appoint priests prior to this time. In any case Oddi was Sæmundur's home and patrimony. Jacqueline Simpson has identified this account as a variant of the migratory legend ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil" (Simpson 1975 p.112¹⁰) (which will be discussed in the next section on the Scottish wizard Michael Scot), but the reference to the Black School suggests that this was once part of a longer account following the same outline as the Gerbert legend. There is even one recorded variant from Iceland which combines the two accounts in a summarized form. (Árnason III 1955 p.491¹¹) It is possible that this full account was known to Gunnlaugur when he composed Jóns Saga, but the final episode was considered inconsistent with a hagiographic account.

Before going any further it is possible to summarize a few points from this material. The earliest recorded legend concerning Sæmundur appeared in the thirteenth century Jóns Saga. This demonstrates that within a century of his death Sæmundur had already begun to gain his reputation as a wizard. A variant of this legend had previously been told about another wizard named Gerbert with the difference that

⁹ Recorded by Magnús Grimsson "from a popular account in Borgarfjórð

¹⁰ From the appendix of tale-types

¹¹ Recorded by Runólf Runólfsson from Holt

unlike Gerbert Sæmundur was never accused of having sold his soul to the Devil. Like Sæmundur Gerbert had been well known for his intellect and his education. He may have made enemies through his political support of the church and rumours that he performed magic could have arisen to explain his personal success.

At some point before the seventeenth century legends that had been associated with other wizards began to be told about Sæmundur and these served as the basis for his growing reputation. Different versions of these legends were told and new variants began to appear. In some cases individual episodes were told separately as complete accounts, or at other times short accounts might be combined to form new, longer legends. The popular migratory legend Escape from the Black School became attached to the legend of Sæmundur's escape from his master recorded in Jóns Saga, and Sæmundur's magic became associated with the Devil.

The next wizard in this study is Master Michael Scot (*sic*, not Scott) from around the turn of the thirteenth century. Michael Scot was probably born in Scotland, but he earned an international reputation in Sicily as the court astrologer and adviser to the Emperor Frederick II. The early history and development of Michael Scot's legend is much better documented than that of Sæmundur the Wise, and in it we can more easily see the processes of legend formation.

Little is actually known about Michael Scot's early life. The best estimates put the date of his birth around the years 1175-80. The Rev. J. Wood Brown has claimed that he was born in the South-East of Scotland and that he was educated first at Roxburgh grammar school, then the cathedral school at Durham. He then cites popular tradition as evidence that Michael Scot had studied at Oxford. (Ibid. p.11-12) This may be related to a tradition popular in some parts of England that gave Oxford graduates a reputation as

great conjurers. In the West Country they were much preferred over Cambridge graduates for dispelling ghosts. (Brown, T. 1979 p.49) Lynn Thorndike has refuted Brown's suggested biography in a footnote, describing it as "much fanciful speculation as to what may have been" and comments that "it must be used with caution", (Thorndike 1923 I p.307) but then falls into much the same trap. Based on references which Scot wrote in his Liber Introductorius, Thorndike suggests that he was a poor son of a widow, supported in his education by an uncle, and that he made extra money while studying by playing the lute and teaching Latin grammar. (Thorndike 1965 p.11-15)

The first known date in Michael Scot's life is 1217 in Toledo when he translated the twelfth century astronomical work of Alpetragius (Al-Bitrogi) from Arabic into Latin. He also translated Averroes' commentaries on Aristotle, and was instrumental in introducing both ancient Greek science and contemporary Arabic thought into western Christian Europe. Scot wrote extensively on many subjects including mathematics, medicine and alchemy all from an astrological perspective. The historian Lynn Thorndike has described Scot as "The leading intellectual in Western Europe during the first third of the thirteenth century" (Thorndike 1965 p.1)

Sometime between 1220 and 1227 Scot took service with the Emperor Frederick II. From 1224-27 there were several papal attempts to find him a benefice; these were probably at the Emperor's urging. Scot was offered the Archbishopric of Cashel in Ireland, but declined on the grounds that he could not speak Irish and would not serve *in absentia*. All of these attempts ceased in 1227 when Frederick II was excommunicated. He was freed from excommunication in 1230, having gone on crusade and negotiated the partial possession of Jerusalem. He was excommunicated again in 1239, but by this time Michael Scot was already dead. (Thorndike 1965 p.32-33) In a poem written in 1235 or '36 Henry of

Avranches, a Norman poet attached to the imperial court, described Scot as having died in the Emperor's service. (Ibid. p.38-39) There is no evidence that Michael Scot ever returned to Scotland.

The earliest accounts concerning Michael Scot were recorded within his own lifetime. In the Liber Introductorius Scot had himself described how he once warned Frederick II not to be bled while the moon was in Gemini for danger that there would be a double puncture. When the Emperor tested this his barber accidentally dropped the lancet on his foot, causing a wound which became infected and had to be treated for a fortnight. Another account in the same text told how Frederick once had Scot measure the distance from the top of a church tower to the stars. He then secretly had the tower shortened by about half a foot and had Scot repeat the measurement. When Scot reached a different result he told the Emperor that either the sky had risen by half a foot or else the tower had sunk into the ground. (Ibid. p.19) This second account is only found in one manuscript from the fourteenth century and it was most likely added by a later author. Scot had himself declared that the distance to the heavens was unknowable.

Several sources from the fourteenth century portray Scot as an astrologer and prophet. Benvenuto da Imola claimed that Scot had predicted that Frederick II would die in Florence, so the Emperor avoided that city, but he died in Florentiola (Little Florence) in Apulia instead. This story was widely known at the time and has been published in a number of variants. About the same time Francisco Pipini recorded an account relating how Scot had prophesied that his own death would come from being struck on the head by a small stone of a specific weight. To avoid this he invented a metal cap called a cerebrerium. One day, while attending mass, Scot removed this cap. A small stone then fell from the vault and struck him on the head. He weighed the stone

and finding it to be of the right weight he arranged his affairs and died. (Bruce 1846 p.71-76) Benvenuto Da Imola repeated this legend and both writers reported that Scot had made various predictions concerning the fate of certain Italian cities.

These accounts are consistent with the reference in Dante's Inferno which put "Michele Scoto" in the circle of diviners and soothsayers (canto XX lines 115-117), but Imola also mentioned that Scot had mixed astrology with magic. This reputation was echoed by Boccaccio in the Decameron. In the ninth tale of the eighth night he referred directly to Michael Scot as a great master of demonology who used his magic to assist gentlemen of rank in love affairs and other matters. While Scot does not actually appear in this tale it is clear that Boccaccio expected his name to be recognized. A magic wine cask was attributed to Michael Scot in Chiosa Sopra Dante, and he appeared briefly at the beginning and end of a tale from the Paradiso degli Alberti in order to perform the magic which introduces the main action. Several other writers also from the fourteenth century describe how Scot used his magic to fetch food and wine from the great royal kitchens of the world. Jacopo della Lana, in his commentary on Dante's Inferno, added that once Scot caused fresh vines with ripe clusters of grapes to appear on the table at a dinner. "The company was bidden each of them to chose a bunch, but their host warned them not to put forth their hands till he should give the sign. At the word "cut", lo, the grapes disappeared and the guests found themselves each with a knife in one hand, and in the other his neighbour's sleeve."¹² Essentially the same tale was later told about the sixteenth century German wizard Dr. Faust. (Palmer and

¹² All three sources, Chiosa Sopra Dante (1375), Paradiso degli Alberti (1384-88), and Dante col Comento di Jacopo della Lana (1321-33) are quoted in Brown 1897 p.210-214

More 1966 p.123)

The earliest recorded references to Michael Scot in Scottish sources appeared in the beginning of the sixteenth century. About 1530 Hector Boethius wrote in the fourteenth book of Scotorum Historiae (ch.21), " In ye time of King Alexander (Alexander III, 13th century) wer mony nobil clarks... Michell Scot rycht excellet in medcyne, quhilk for his singulare erudition was no les tredit with (regarded by) Edward King of England, yan with Alexand King of Scottis". Boethius does not mention Scot's reputation for magic, although earlier in the same chapter he reported a prophecy given by Thomas the Rhymer concerning the death of Alexander III. Either Boethius was not aware that Scot was regarded as a wizard, or else he chose to omit this. (Boethius fol.204) About a decade later John Leland the Antiquarian claimed he had it on good authority that Scot was not a Scotsman, and that he was from Durham, in England. (Leland 1535-43 1709 I p.254) This passage is only a single paragraph; however Leland is clearly describing the thirteenth century scholar as he refers directly to the Liber Introductorius.

In Camden's Britannia, originally published at the end of the sixteenth century, William Camden claimed that Scot was a monk at the abbey of Ulme, or Holme-Cultrain, in Cumberland about the year 1290. "Here, they say, are still preserved the magic books of Michael Scot, but now mouldering to dust." (Camden 1586 p.827) Both Camden and Leland identify Scot as a mathematician whom the vulgar looked upon as a wizard. At the beginning of that century, in 1519, Theophilus Folgenius, writing under the name Merlin Locains, had claimed that Scot could summon demons, ride an enchanted horse, sail an enchanted ship and wrap himself in a cloak of invisibility. Folgenius apparently did not associate Scot with the Black School legend as he said that despite his invisibility, in bright sunlight, Scot's shadow could be seen. (Bruce 1846 p.204) Finally in 1597 King James VI may

have been referring to Michael Scot in the first book of his *Daemonologie* when he described "that Italian called **Scoto**" (emphasis his) as a wizard and servant of the Devil. (James VI 1597 p.22)

Earlier in the same work Leland had quoted Roger Bacon who mentioned "Michael Scottus" along with "Aluredus Anglicus, et Heremannus (Alemannus), et Willielmus Flemingus" in a list of distinguished translators. (Leland c.1540 p.214) Guido Bonatti, who lived at about the same time, included "Michael Scotus" in a similar list where "Scotus" was clearly used to refer to Michael's nationality, not his family name. It seems unlikely that Bacon, who lived in the same century as Master Michael, could have mistaken an Englishman for a Scot.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Sir Walter Scott identified Michael Scot as the Baron of Balwearie castle in Fife, (Scott, W. 1805 p.244) although the Scott family did not take possession of those lands until the end of the thirteenth century, a half century after Michael Scot's death. Apparently tradition has confused him with a Sir Michael Scot, who was sent to fetch Queen Margaret, the "maid of Norway", around 1290. James Hogg claimed that Michael Scot lived at Aikwood tower near Selkirk. (Hogg 1813 p.) This tower had been occupied by another Master Michael Scot at the beginning of the sixteenth century (Maley 1992 p.66) and James Galbraith of the Scottish Record Office has suggested that this Michael Scot may have been the original model for the legendary wizard (1991). Michael Scot has also been associated with Ardrossan Castle in Strathclyde. (Mitchell and Dickie 1839 p.288) According to tradition Scot was buried at either Melrose Abbey, Holme-Cultrain or the abbey at Glenluce in Galloway.

Despite all the various conflicting accounts there are some points which can be drawn from this material. Like Gerbert and Sæmundur the Wise, Michael Scot was well known

for his education and intelligence in Italy and in his native Britain, at least Roger Bacon was familiar with his translations. Initially he earned his reputation as a mathematician and astrologer, and accounts were recorded of his predictions concerning the future, but in the fourteenth century accusations began to emerge of his having practised magic. This may have been partly the result of his association with Frederick II during his period of excommunication, and, like Gerbert, his association with Arab learning. By the fifteenth century his reputation as a wizard was well known in Italy, and it was widespread throughout the Scottish Borders and the north of England in the sixteenth century. In different areas legends concerning Michael Scot became associated with local landmarks such as abbeys, castles and the cathedral at Durham. This was especially likely to happen around centres of learning or places where someone actually named Michael Scot was known to have lived.

One of the most popular legends concerning Michael Scot is the migratory legend ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil". This legend was first recorded by Sir Walter Scott in his appendix to the Lay of the Last Minstrel (Scott, W. 1805 p.249) and some of the later recorded accounts can be shown to have been derived from, or at least influenced by, this version, although there still remain some half dozen or so independent variants. In this legend Michael Scot needed swift transportation, so he summoned the Devil in the form of a horse to carry him where he wanted to go. This motif was so popular that it is referred to in a few unrelated accounts. In one legend from South Uist Michael Scot is introduced:

He had the devil for a horse to ride... When they went across the sea, the adversary used to ask Michael how it was that he was able to ride him, so

that he could shoot him off his back. Michael would say, "Mount higher Devil". (Gaelic: "Marcaich thusa Dhiabhuil") (MacInnes 1963 p.107)

In a similar treatment of the legend William Scrope gives the phrase, "Mount, Diabolus, and fly" (Scrope 1843 p.186) quoting Sir Walter Scott who was probably translating the Scots "Munt, Deil, and flee" as it appears in some other variants. (Mitchell and Dickie 1839 p.290)

A full account of this legend was translated from Gaelic by Duncan M. Campbell.

On a certain year Michael Scot, a learned man and famous in his day, was chosen to proceed to Rome to obtain the knowledge of Shrove-tide; but, because of the many other matters he had to attend to, he forgot his duty until all the feasts of the year were over at Candlemas. There was not a minute to lose. He betook himself to one of the fairy riding-fillies, and said to her, "How swift are you?" "I am as fleet as the wind," replied she. "You will not do," says Michael. He reached a second one. "How swift are you?" "I am as swift as that I can outspeed the wind that comes behind me, and overtake the wind that goes before me." "You will not do," says Michael. The third was as fleet as the "black blast of March". "Scarcely will you do," says Michael. He arrived at the fourth one, and put his question to her. "I am as swift as the thought of a maiden between her two lovers." "You will be of service," says Michael; "make ready." "I am always ready if the man were in accord with me," says she.

They started. Sea and land were alike to them. While they were above the sea the witch said to him, "What say the women of Scotland when they quench the fire?" "You ride," says Michael, "in your master's name and never mind that." "Blessings to thyself, but a curse on thy teacher," replied she. "What," says she again, "say the wives of Scotland when they put the first weanling to bed, and a suckling at their breast?" "Ride you in your master's name, and let the wives of Scotland sleep," responded Michael. (Campbell, A. 1889 p.49-51)

The word translated as "witch" is *glaistig*, a

supernatural being, which is not inconsistent with the earlier identification as a fairy. Other variants of the legend make it clear that Michael Scot's horse was the Devil. (Campbell, J.G. 1900 p.286) The questions are intended to make the wizard say the name of God, which will break the spell and cause him to fall to his death. Some of the motifs which occur in this account are also found in a legend from the seventeenth century concerning the German wizard Dr. Faust. In this legend Faust has travelled from Prague to Erfurt on a magic horse. There he summoned a spirit.

Soon someone enters and says, "Sir, what do you wish?" Faust asks, "How quick are you?" The other answers, "As an arrow". "No," says Dr. Faust, "you shall not serve me. Go back where you came from." Then he knocks again and when another servant enters and asks the same question, he says, "How quick are you?" "As the wind," says he. "That is something," says Dr. Faust, but sends him out again too. But when he knocked a third time, another entered, and, when he was asked the same question, said he was as quick as the thoughts of man. "Good," says Dr. Faust, "you'll do." (Palmer and More 1966 p.111-115)

Faust then sent the spirit to fetch food and drink for his company, as Michael Scot had been reported doing a century earlier. In both of these legends the wizard travels by riding on a magic horse. In both he performs magic by summoning a spirit, and the questions which he asks are essentially the same. This is a fairly common motif, and the order of the events has changed. There is clearly some relationship between the two accounts, but it would be impossible to describe them as variants of the same legend.

The conversation between Michael Scot and the Devil-horse while on their journey also has parallels in other legends. The questions which the Devil asks are all intended to make Scot answer with the name of the Lord. This would break the spell holding the Devil and cause him to throw Scot

into the sea, and presumably to his death. The idea that the name of God could banish evil spirits is a very old one, and the consequences for anyone being carried by these spirits is obvious. For example on the fifteenth night of the Thousand and One Nights a merchant told how he was once rescued from an island in a boat rowed by a man of brass. On seeing land after ten days at sea the merchant praised Allah. "Hardly had I breathed the sacred words than the man of brass caught hold of me and threw me into the sea." (Mardus and Mathers 1964 p.92) The results of calling on the name of the Lord were not always fatal, however, and could on occasion even be beneficial. In Thomas Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur (book XIV ch.vi) Sir Percival was carried the distance of a four days' journey in a single hour or less by a magic horse which would have carried him into "rough water", but Sir Percival made the sign of the cross on his forehead. "Whan the fende felt him soo charged he shooke of(f) Syr Percyval and wente in to the water cryenge." (Malory 1485) There is no evidence relating either of these accounts directly to the migratory legend, but they each could have influenced the others by reflecting and supporting a common set of beliefs.

The legend concerning Sir Percival resembles many later accounts describing water-horses common in the Celtic world, and occasionally found in Iceland and Scandinavia. (Árnason I p.129-131) The migratory legend ML 3025 also resembles some variants of another migratory legend, ML 5005: "Journey with a Troll" in which a horse or carriage driver described as a troll is banished by the name of God. The distinguishing feature, for our purposes, is that in the wizard legends the Devil is summoned whereas the water-horse or troll is always encountered by chance.

The act of summoning and commanding demons was known in the middle ages as necromancy, or demonology. One demonologists handbook from the fifteenth century even gave instructions on how a wizard could summon the Devil in the

form of a horse to carry the wizard where ever he wanted to go. The book then went on to warn the wizard not to make the sign of the cross while flying on such a horse as the blessing would banish the demon. (Kieckhefer 1989 p.6+197) This was echoed in the Malleus Maleficarum written about the end of the same century, "And what of those magicians whom we generally call necromancers, who are carried through the air by devils for long distances? And sometimes even persuade others to go with them on a horse, which is not really a horse but a devil in that form, and, as they say, thus warn their companions not to make the sign of the cross." (Sprenger and Institoris (1485) part II question 1 ch.3) Such references show that these stories were popular, and were closely associated with demonology, at the same time that Michael Scot's reputation was growing in Scotland.

The legend of Michael Scot's journey to Rome continues when Scot arrived in Rome.

It was morning. He sent swift message to the Pope that the messenger from Scotland was at the door seeking knowledge of Shrove-tide, lest Lent would go away. The Pope came at once to the audience room. "Whence art thou?" he said to Michael. "I am from thy faithful children of Scotland, seeking knowledge of Shrove-tide, lest Lent will go away," says Michael. "You were late in coming." "Early that leases me," replied Michael. "You have ridden somewhat high." "Neither high nor low, but right ahead," says Michael. "I see," says the Pope, "snow on your bonnet." "Yes, by your leave, the snow of Scotland." "What proof can you give me of that? likewise that you have come from Scotland to seek knowledge of Shrove-tide?" "That," says Michael, "a shoe is on your foot that is not your own." The Pope looked, and on his right foot was a woman's shoe. "You will get what you want," says the Pope, "and begone. The first Tuesday at the first moon of Spring is Shrove-tide." (Campbell, A. 1889 p.51-53)

The conclusion to this legend is similar to a tale in

Boccaccio's Decameron. In the second tale of the ninth day an abbess was woken up in the middle of the night by her nuns in order to catch one of the sisters in bed with a man. Before the abbess could decide on the proper punishment the guilty nun pointed out that in her haste to get dressed the abbess had put a man's pants on her head instead of her veil, proving that she, too, had been sleeping with a man that night. Another account from Kilchrenan in Argyle is that Michael Scot got the secret of Shrove-tide by courting the Pope's daughter. (Maclagan mss.¹³ XLI 3378/3(7)) This may have resembled the legend of how Gerbert seduced the Saracen's daughter in order to steal the book of magic. Unfortunately this variant has not been recorded in full. This motif also occurs in the poem "Hávamál" (III) when the god Óðinn seduced the giantess Gunnlöð in order to steal the mead of poetry from her father Suttungr.

These accounts differ from variants of the legend collected in the Lowlands of Scotland, which all share certain common features showing a distinct tradition. One variant from the middle of the Strathclyde region begins in much the same way as the Highland legend, but ends quite differently.

At that time the fock of Scotland were oppressed with Pow Sillar ["poll-silver", probably some form of ecclesiastical tax]. And Michael Scot went to Rome to the Pope to get it taen aff, and he muntit his horse on the tap of the castle, and the print of the horse's foot stands there to this day. He said "Munt, deil, and flee". And they went through the lift to Rome. And on the way the horse speirit at him, what the auld wyfes in Scotland said when they went to bed. He replied, "Neir mind, but munt and flee." At Rome he desired the fock of Scotland to be relieved of the Pow Sillar, or else that his horse will give three nickers. The horse gave ae sneer and made the city hall shake. And on the second, the lum pigs (chimney

¹³ In the archives of the School of Scottish Studies.

pots) cam down. But they wad not permit a third nicker, they relieved him of the Pow Sillar. And hame Michael and his horse went. (Mitchell and Dickie 1839 p.290)

The motif of the Devil-horse giving three nickers also occurs in the legend concerning Dr. Faust, although in a very different context. Sir Walter Scott gives an account similar to this one, except that he has Michael Scot sent on embassy to the King of France in order to obtain compensation for acts of piracy committed against Scottish subjects. (Scott, W. 1805 p.249) Another account from Islay claims that Scot went to France to recover the eleven days lost in the change from the old calendar.

He intimated the object of his visit, demanding of the people the days of which he was in search, but they said they knew nothing of them. Not satisfied with that answer he, with the aid of his horse, destroyed the town. He then went to another town and demanded of its inhabitants that they should restore to him the lost eleven days. They refused. "One neigh and kick of a horse I have got," said Michael, "will send your town to destruction." The people laughed at him for they saw no horse. Then Michael waved the halter in the air as he had done before leaving Scotland, and the black horse appeared breathing fire. The people trembled at the sight and gave up the missing days. (Banks 1839 II p.141)

The antagonism expressed in these accounts toward the Pope and to France could not likely predate the Reformation in the sixteenth century when Scotland became Protestant and Franco-Scottish relations broke down. (In some Norwegian variants of this legend Martin Luther is said to ride the Devil to Rome to see the Pope.) The change from the old calendar came at the end of the seventeenth century. These legends were all recorded in the nineteenth century, and cannot strictly be regarded as representative of any other period; however they could not have achieved their present

forms prior to around the seventeenth century.

Both of these migratory legends related concerning Michael Scot and Sæmundur the Wise reflect the late medieval belief in demonology. In the ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School" Sæmundur learned his magic from the Devil, this legend was also told about Scot, and both wizards were said to have summoned the Devil to carry them across great distances. Generally speaking the word "demonology" describes any form of magic which is performed through the direct aid or intervention of demons. In the twelfth century a form of demonology emerged, called necromancy,¹⁴ which combined the Christian practice of exorcism with Arab astral magic. This development was directly related to the rise of the universities and changing attitudes towards education.

Throughout the early middle ages the church had held a virtual monopoly on education. The only major centres of education had been the monasteries. In the eleventh century the cathedral schools appeared. These were initially created to train new clergy in the Latin, literacy and rituals that they would need to perform their duties within the church, they also made it possible for a layman intending to pursue a career in court to acquire a systematic education. Then in the twelfth century universities arose which offered a wide

¹⁴ The word necromancy originally meant divination through communicating with the dead (from the Greek "nekroi"). In this form necromancy had been widely practised throughout pre-Christian Europe and even occurs in the Bible. In I Samuel 28 the Witch of Endor summoned the prophet Samuel from the grave to predict the outcome of a battle. When medieval theologians encountered such tales they argued that mortal humans could not summon the spirits of the dead out of Heaven or Hell where they had been consigned by God. The spirits must therefore have been demons in disguise. In this way necromancy became confused with demonology. Some writers, not understanding the term, changed it to nigromancy. (from the Latin "niger" meaning black) It is from this that we get the term "black magic".

range of studies in the liberal arts, as well as faculties in theology, medicine and law. Despite these changes an education was still regarded primarily as a step towards the priesthood and students at universities were routinely ordained to the minor orders of clerics. One of these orders was that of exorcist, and, as part of the ordination, the student would receive a book of exorcisms. (Kieckhefer 1990 p.153)

The change from monastic to secular education brought with it an interest in ideas from outside of orthodox Christianity, and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries scholars began to translate Arabic texts into Latin. These primarily included the works of Aristotle and other Greek writers which had been lost in Europe, but often the Arabic commentaries were included in the translations. Through these Europe was introduced to new ideas in alchemy, algebra and especially astrology and astral magic. Arabic astrology in the twelfth century was based on the belief that events on earth were governed by spirits inhabiting the stars and the signs of the zodiac. Astral magic attempted to influence these spirits in turn through complicate rituals involving the manipulation of astrological symbols. In a Christian context these spirits were readily identified as demons.

Late medieval demonology combined many of these features. The typical demonologist was depicted as an educated cleric. The magic was performed through complicated rituals intended to invoke demons and command them to perform specific tasks. One of the first writers to discuss demonology was Michael Scot. In his Liber Introductorius he named several demons and described how they could be invoked. He also referred directly to Gerbert when he described a "master Gilbertus" as the best necromancer in France who later reformed and became Pope. (Thorndike 1923 p.705) Interest in demonology increased in the fourteenth century, largely as a result of a number of well publicized trials in

this period. Many of these trials involved prominent secular and ecclesiastical figures, and they were most likely inspired by political motives, but they were consistent with the belief in demonology. The majority of these early trials occurred in France and in Italy, areas associated with the wizards Sæmundur the Wise and Master Michael Scot.

It was roughly at this time that the migratory legends first began to develop and spread. The earliest legends concerning Sæmundur and Michael Scot had been recorded about a century earlier. In these both wizards were portrayed primarily as astrologers, and Michael Scot in particular was associated with Arabic learning. The first legends depicting Scot as a wizard were recorded in the fourteenth century. He was said to summon demons and ride an enchanted horse, possibly a reference to ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil", at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The earliest variant of ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School" concerning Sæmundur were recorded at the end of the seventeenth century.

A third migratory legend told in both Scotland and Iceland which reflects medieval beliefs in demonology is ML 3020: "Inexperienced use of the Black Book". In this legend the wizard sends a servant to fetch his black book of magic, usually warning him not to open it. On his return trip out of curiosity the servant opens the book, and the Devil appears demanding to be given work. The servant then gives the Devil an impossible task, telling him to twist ropes out of sand. (Christiansen 1958 p.28) Variants of this legend have been recorded throughout Britain and Scandinavia.

In Iceland this legend has been recorded in several variants concerning the Rev Eiríkur Magnússon. Little is known about the Rev. Eiríkur. He was a parish priest at Vogsóssar in Selvogspings parish in the south of Iceland. Born in 1637 or '38 he died in 1716, barely noticed by the annalists of his time. (Benediktz 1964 p.9) In the Legends of

the Icelandic wizards, however, the Rev. Eiríkur was second only to Sæmundur the Wise. He was one of the most popular, as well as the most powerful, wizards, and many stories have been recorded about him. He was also the only wizard who regularly accepted apprentices and taught them magic.

Many young boys went to the priest Eiríkur and asked him to teach them. He tested them in various ways and taught them as seemed best to him. Among others was a boy who asked to be taught magic. Eiríkur responded, "Stay with me until Sunday and then follow me to Krísvík, afterward I'll tell you yes or no." They rode off on Sunday, but as they came to Sandur Eiríkur said, "I have forgotten my handbook. It's under my pillow. Go and fetch it, but don't open it up." The boy went and got the book and rode out to Sandur. Now, he wanted to look in the book, and he did so. Then countless imps came to him and asked, "What to do? what to do?" He answered quickly, "Twist rope out of sand." They sat down to start and he continued on and reached the priest out on the lava fields. He took the book and said, "You've opened it up." The boy denied it. They continued on now as they had intended, but on the return trip the priest saw where the imps were sitting on the sand. Then he said, "I knew that you opened the book, my boy, although you denied it. But that was a clever plan you took and it would be worth teaching you a little." It is said that he taught him. (Árnason I 1954 p.545¹⁵)

In other variants of this legend the imps are summoned by opening a magic box rather than a book. (Ibid. III 1955 p.513¹⁶) In all accounts they are identified as either a swarm of midges or imps (Icelandic *púkar*, related to the English word "puck"). They are never described in Icelandic variants as Devils. The motif of twisting ropes out of sand also occurs in the Edda in the poem "Hárbarðsljóð" (XVIII).

The earliest variant of this legend is an account concerning Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085).

¹⁵ Recorded by Brynólf of Minnanúp "from Selvóg"

¹⁶ There are three variants given, recorded by the Rev. Skúli Gíslason, Magnús Grimsson and Markús Gíslason

Coming one day from his Alban villa, he found, just as he was entering the church of the Lateran, that he had left behind him his magical book, which he was accustomed to carry about his person. He immediately sent two trusty servants to fetch it, at the same time threatening them most fearfully if they should attempt to look into the volume. Curiosity however got the better of their fear. They opened the book, and began to read; when presently a number of devils appeared, saying, "We are come to obey your commands, but, if we find ourselves trifled with, we shall certainly fall upon and destroy you." The servants, exceedingly terrified, replied, "our will is that you should immediately throw down so much of the wall of the city as is now before us." The devils obeyed; and the servants escaped the danger that hung over them." (Godwin 1834 p.239)

In another variant of this legend the servants save themselves by making the sign of the cross. (Bruce 1846 p.84) Another account from the fourteenth century features a book of magic, but does not include the Devil. In this account the Bishop Jón Halldórsson, while a young boy studying in Paris, read a chapter from his master's great book. Immediately a storm started up. When the master returned he asked if anyone had trifled with his book, and Jón confessed. The master then read another chapter and the storm abruptly stopped. "From such may be marked," said the Bishop, "what craft lives in books, though the world grows old." (Jónsson 1981 I p.463)

Two similar accounts have been recorded concerning Sæmundur the Wise. In a nineteenth century account a serving girl blew through a magic pipe which she found under Sæmundur's pillow and the Devil appeared. She set him to counting the hairs on some sheepskins. (Árnason 1862 I p.479¹⁷) In another account from the seventeenth century the Devil appeared while Sæmundur was away and threatened to take Sæmundur's daughter. She was making her father's bed at the

¹⁷ Recorded by Magnús Grímsson from Helgi Helgason

time, and she agreed to go if the Devil could count all of the feathers in her father's quilt. The Devil started counting and had just reached the final feather when Sæmundur returned home. The Devil did not dare to face Sæmundur, and left without the girl. (Árnason I 1954 p.470¹⁸) Sæmundur's daughter, Margrét, also appeared in a variant of ML 3025 from the nineteenth century. (Árnason I 1954 p.485¹⁹) In his description of ML 3020: "Inexperienced use of the Black Book" Christiansen lists several different possible tasks, and the motif of delaying the Devil, or some other supernatural being, by having him count things is common in Britain and Scandinavia. While this legend resembles the migratory legend, however, the motif of the Black Book itself is missing. No explanation is given for why the Devil appeared. He was not summoned, rather seemed to appear by choice.

Each of these accounts fit the same basic outline as the migratory legend, but they contain different motifs and it is uncertain whether they could all be called variants of the same legend. The motif of a magician's servant initiating a spell with disastrous effects is widespread. The earliest such account was recorded in the second century by Lucian of Samosata about a sorcerer's apprentice who brought a mortar and pestle to life. (Kieckhefer 1990 p.32) These could have had an admonitory function of warning the inexperienced not to practice magic.

The motifs of spinning ropes of sand and the magic book which summons spirits can both be found in the legends of Michael Scot. In the prologue to his Liber Introductorius Scot listed several famous wizards and their books of magic,

¹⁸ This and other legends were recorded by Árni Magnússon from Bishop Björn Þorleifsson, Captain Magnús Arason and Halldór Þorbergsson from Seyla. (see note 9)

¹⁹ Recorded by Þorstein Þórarinnsson "from the east in Múlarýsla district"

including one which he called The Book of Consecrations from Certain Experiments. When this book was opened the voices of the spirits in whose name it had been consecrated could be heard demanding work. (Thorndike 1965 p.120) Thomas Dempster referred to this same tradition when he claimed that in his youth in Scotland at the turn of the seventeenth century Michael Scot's books were still in existence, but that they could not be opened without summoning fiends. (Dempster, T. 1627 p.495) The motif of spinning ropes of sand is common in the south of England, although the spirits are more often ghosts than the Devil. Similar legends have been told about Michael Scot and are often attached to local landmarks.

"Michael Scot was, once upon a time, much embarrassed by a spirit, for whom he was under the necessity of finding constant employment. He commanded him to build a cauld, or dam-head across the Tweed at Kelso: it was accomplished in one night, and still does honour to the infernal architect. Michael next ordered, that Eildon hill, which was then a uniform cone, should be divided into three. Another night was sufficient to part its summit into three picturesque peaks which it now bears. At length the enchanter conquered this indefatigable daemon, by employing him in the hopeless and endless task of making ropes out of sea-sand. (Scott, W. 1805 p.251)

The full account of ML 3020: "Inexperienced use of the Black Book" has been recorded concerning Michael Scot in only one variant from Fife in the mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately this version is an elaborate and literary retelling with several asides and commentary concerning contemporary events and it can not be used to reconstruct an oral tradition. (Gardiner 1842 p.70-72) In Sutherland this legend has been told about another wizard, Donald Duival MacKay. According to tradition Donald Duival was the first Lord Reay and fifteenth chief of MacKay, also known as Domhnull Duaghal. Domhnull was born in 1590, and succeeded his father as clan chief in 1614. He raised a regiment to

fight in Germany during the thirty years war. There he won a reputation as a brave leader and was created Lord Reay. (Iwase 1992 p.10)

There was a boke (sic.) of magic much consulted by Donald. He once lent it to another wizard, a relation of his own, who returned it by a servant. The man was duly charged not to open its pages by the way; but, curiosity prevailing, the churl opened the leaves, and was instantly surrounded by hundreds of "little men", who cried "Work, work!" The servant was horribly frightened; but thinking it safest to keep them employed, he bade them twist ropes of the heather. Quick as light all the heather within sight was coiled into ropes. Again they cried, "Work, work!" The servant despatched them to the bay of tongue, and bade them turn its sand into ropes. With an angry scream at finding the work impossible they plunged into the sea, and Donald-Duival lost his servitors among the little men. (Dempster, "Miss" 1888 p.153)

In another variant of this legend Donald got hold of this book by having fought the Devil hand-to-hand, and won. Donald was also said to have studied at the Black School. Both the magic book which summons spirits and the motif of weaving ropes of sand have been associated in legend with Michael Scot in the Lowlands, and it's tempting to believe that the migratory legend may have originated there. Unfortunately such an argument would require a detailed analysis of all of the international variant, and that falls outside the scope of this study.

The Devil features in many of the wizard legends. Often the clever wizards are portrayed making deals with the foolish Devil, promising rewards in exchange for the Devil's help, then cheating him out of the payment when the work was done. In one account Michael Scot was said to have sold his soul for a bonnet full of gold.

The Devil duly turned up at the appointed place and poured the pieces into the open bonnet that Scot had

laid upon the ground - but unknown to his satanic majesty a great pit was dug below that ate up the gold as fast as it came through the hole in the bonnet. (Scrimgeour-Jackson 1833 p.83)

In many of the legends concerning Sæmundur from the seventeenth century the Devil is not referred to by name. He can even be described as Sæmundur's "servant spirit". This may have been a response to the witchcraft trials of that time, and concern over associating a popular hero with demonic magic.

Sæmundur told his servant spirit to build a bridge over Rangá under Bergvað as often it was difficult to cross the river, especially for those who would sometimes come to Oddi. The spirit should have as payment the first three who should cross the bridge the first Sunday, he should have them, to which Sæmundur consented. When the bridge was finished to fulfil his promise Sæmundur had three whelps carried to the bridge and thrown out onto it, with which the bridge builder had to be satisfied as he got nothing else in payment. (Einarsson 1955 p.41)

This is another migratory legend. It was told on the Welsh Border about Jack o' Kent (Simpson 1976 p.58) and has been recorded as far away as Italy. It appears in the Aarne-Thompson index of Types of the Folk-Tale as type 1191: The Dog on the Bridge. In most countries where this tale has been recorded the spirit is identified as the Devil, as was probably the case in earlier variants of this legend in Iceland. Most of the legends told about Sæmundur have not been identified as migratory legends and do not appear in any index of tale-types, however many of them would be listed under the types 810-814: The Man Promised to the Devil and 1170-1199: A Man Sells his soul to the Devil (saves it through deceit).

In one account from Scotland the wizard Cameron of Locheil used his wits to save his serving maid who had sold her soul to the Devil in return for his repairing a sugar

bowl which she had broken.

She told all this to her master, and when the Devil came that same night to claim her, Locheil gave his former teacher a hospitable reception. When it waxed late, the Devil, afraid of the cock-crowing, was preparing to go away. Cameron coaxed him to remain til the inch still remaining of the candle on the table should burn down. Whenever he gave his consent Cameron blew out the candle and gave it to the servant, telling her her life depended on its safe custody. In this manner the Devil was cheated by his former pupil. (Campbell, J.G. 1900 p.286-287)

Similar legends were told of Sæmundur the Wise. In these accounts his relationship with the Devil is portrayed as antagonistic.

Fetching water in Oddi was very difficult, so the cook made a deal with the Devil that he should carry water for her and in return he would have what she carried, for she was then pregnant. The cook reluctantly told Sæmundur about this, so he ordered her helper to carry the water in a basket. With this he became very angry, went with the basket to Rangá and carried the water in it about half-way back. The second time he got a little further. He tried a third time and came to smiðjuhóll. It's then said that Sæmundur had the church bell rung. The water carrier was so startled that he sank down into the ground. A spring came up there that was since called Skollabrunnur ("Devil's-spring"). In that same spring a child drowned in the days of the Rev. Stefán at Oddi so it was closed up with dirt. (Einarsson 1955 p.44)

In the middle ages consecrated church bells were generally believed to drive away demons and were rung to avert bad luck. Stith Thompson has argued that the Devil in these legends is not the personification of evil from Christian theology, rather his portrayal is consistent with the stupid ogres and trolls from traditional folk-tales. (Thompson 1946 p.42) At best this argument is an oversimplification. The Devil in these legends is portrayed as the enemy of Christianity, and he is actively engaged in

collecting the souls of sinners. By exorcising the Devil on behalf of a member of his parish Sæmundur was fulfilling his role as a Christian priest. This is reinforced by another account recorded in the seventeenth century.

He was buried at St. Nicholai church at Oddi in Rangarvall northwest of the church door towards the mouth of the valley. A stone of uncut rock was lain on the grave which has now sunk into the earth. There had long been the belief (though it is now dying out) that sick men have sat watch at night over it and left cured of their illness, even those who had received the last rights. (Einarsson 1955 p.cvi)

This practice is consistent with the tales of pilgrimages and miraculous cures associated with the legends of saints. It's interesting to note that even in the seventeenth century when this account was recorded the belief was regarded as being quite old, it might represent an earlier stage in the development of Sæmundur's reputation.

At this point it is possible to draw a few preliminary conclusions concerning the international wizard tradition. The wizards in this study all share certain common features, although not every one meets all of these traits to the same degree, and from these a general profile can be constructed of the typical wizard. All of these legends were based on actual historical figures. They were generally well educated men, and both Michael Scot and Sæmundur the Wise had earned widespread reputations for their scholarship and education. They may also have been involved in the politics of their times and this could have been a factor in the initial accusations of practising magic.

The earliest legends recorded in the thirteenth century concerning Sæmundur and Scot depict them both as astrologers. The episode in Jóns Saga concerning Sæmundur is related to an account recorded a century earlier about Gerbert, except that in the later account the element of demonology is absent and

Sæmundur is associated with St. Jón, a strong opponent of pagan beliefs. This may reflect a much milder attitude towards magic in Iceland than in the rest of Europe, or the author could have been adapting his sources for use in a hagiographic account.

The first accounts explicitly linking Michael Scot with the practice of magic appeared in the fourteenth century. Scot had earlier written about demonology describing both Gerbert and a book which could not be opened without summoning spirits. This may be one source for the migratory legend ML 3020: "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book". A similar account was recorded about Bishop Jón Halldórsson in Iceland in which reading from a book had summoned a storm. These demonstrate common beliefs about the power of books and the dangers of practicing magic, but they cannot be regarded as variants of the same legend.

In the early fourteenth century a number of prominent trials had helped to popularize the belief in demonology. By the fifteenth century the belief that wizards could summon the Devil in the form of a horse, which is central to ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil", was recorded in several sources as an active belief. This may have been associated with Michael Scot as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century when Theophilus Folgenius wrote that he could summon demons and ride an enchanted horse. This was later to become the most popular and widespread legend concerning Scot, and it is usually told with a lengthy conclusion concerning events in the seventeenth century.

At the end of the seventeenth century several legends were recorded concerning Sæmundur the Wise. These include accounts, possibly from pre-Reformation times, of miraculous cures at his tomb. This would suggest a possible pilgrimage site similar to those associated with medieval saints. Other accounts recorded at the time combine ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School" with variants of the legend recorded in



Jóns Saga. This presents an apparent contradiction. While Sæmundur is said to practice demonology his portrayal in the legends is consistent with the role of a medieval priest using his knowledge to exorcise the Devil.

All of these features then shaped the reputations of the wizards. They were portrayed as educated men who had learned their magic at the Devil's Black School; they possessed powerful books of magic which could be dangerous to open or even own, and they performed their magic by summoning and commanding the Devil. This is essentially the role of a medieval demonologist, with the exception that while demonology was condemned the wizards are presented as at worst ambiguous characters.

The Icelandic Wizards

In Iceland the medieval belief in demonology may have influenced the early development of the wizard tradition, but the devil is not prominent in the majority of the legends. Unlike Sæmundur the Wise the majority of the wizards were associated with ghosts and elves, the traditional figures of Icelandic folklore. This change in emphasis is reflected in the legends concerning the Rev. Hálfðan of Fell. Hálfðan was said to have studied at the Black School along with Sæmundur and Kálfur Árnason, although Hálfðan actually lived in the sixteenth century, roughly 450 years after Sæmundur. The first legends about Hálfðan were recorded in the seventeenth century. These often resemble the legends told about Sæmundur. For example both of the legends related in the last chapter in which Sæmundur made the Devil build a bridge and carry water in a basket have been recorded with the Rev. Hálfðan. (Einarsson 1955 p.cxiv) Similar legends were also told about Kálfur Árnason, but only a few of these survive. (Árnason 1954 I p.486-489¹) Another popular legend told about Hálfðan and the Devil has not been recorded concerning either Kálfur or Sæmundur.

Late one winter the Rev. Hálfðan was short of stockfish for his farm, and there was none in the area, rather times were hard for men. The priest had a fishing station on the isle of Grimsey as was common since the fishing was better near Grimsey than elsewhere, and the priest had enough stockfish there, but at that time Grimsey was inaccessible due to high surf and rough seas. The priest then promised the Devil that he should have his soul if he could fetch the stockfish from Grimsey and not get them wet, or else he'd be out of the deal. The Devil thought that this was a good offer and agreed to the deal, but insisted that Hálfðan should supply a vessel. The priest then gave the Devil an old ash-trough and said he wouldn't

¹ All recorded by Þorsteinn Þórarinnsson from Ingibjörg Pálsdóttir

get any other vessel. The Devil then set out, though he was not well fitted out. That was late in the day. The next morning the Rev. Hálfðan's wife was up early and checked the weather. She came back in and the priest asked how the weather was, and she said the weather was bright and the sky clear except that there was a dark wisp of cloud north of the land and travelling fast. The priest said, "Then it's time to get dressed, and the old man was quick in his journey." The priest then quickly dressed, and as he came out the Devil was coming to land. He was so surprised to see the Rev. Hálfðan that he didn't watch himself and a wave broke over the vessel and all the stockfish got wet, although not more than to only get the tail damp. When the Devil put the fish down the priest showed him the tails and said that he was out of a deal according to their bargain. (Árnason 1954 I p.502-3²)

Another variant of this legend implied that Hálfðan had caused the wave that dampened the fish, and in a third variant he employed two groups of imps, one to carry the fish and keep them dry and the other to get the fish wet. Both were only partially successful so neither got his soul. (Ibid. III p.529³) Jón Eggertsson recorded another variant of this legend in the seventeenth century, but he made no mention of the Devil although he did mention that the fishes's tails were wet. (Einarsson 1955 p.14) This may be due to the fact that Jón had himself been accused of practising magic and he was, therefore, hesitant to imply any association with the Devil. Jón made his own attitude towards the wizards clear. "Here in Iceland many men have been well learned ("*fróðir*") who have had books of runes with them and various devices, even clerks and educated men and famous men in olden times although never has any of them been accused of doing harm to man or beast through improper actions." (Ibid. p.13)

² Recorded by Jón of Gautlönd

³ Recorded by Jón Kristjánsson and p.529-30 from "a well known tale"

In the legends from the nineteenth century Hálfðan was more often depicted dealing with trolls and ghosts, the traditional figures of Icelandic folklore, than with the Devil. One of the most popular of these legends is the story of Hálfðan and the "Woman of Malmey".

It is said that a curse had been laid on the island of Malmey in Skagafjörður that no one might be there longer than twenty years. Once in the days of the Rev. Hálfðan there lived a farmer named Jón. He was a good man and well off and he was married when this story happened. Jón had built a farm on Malmey and lived there the whole time that he had been a farmer, and now the twenty years that it was safe for him to be there were almost up. No one had ever dared to be there longer, but since Jón was a resolute man and had little belief in superstition, and also since Malmey had been his patrimony and he had done well there, he wouldn't leave. So the twenty-first year went by until Christmas and nothing had happened. But on Christmas eve the farmer's wife disappeared, and though there was a search no one could tell what had happened to her.

Farmer Jón felt that this was the worst thing that could have happened, and he wanted to know how his wife could have disappeared. So he went on a trip to see the Rev. Hálfðan of Fell. When he got there he called on the priest and told him his problem. The priest said that he certainly could find out what had happened to his wife and where she had gone, but it would be useless as he would get no further enjoyment from her company. The farmer asked where it could be arranged for him to see his wife. "I would find it very comforting if I could see her and know where she is," said he. The priest said that he was very sorry to grant such a request, though he would do it since he'd asked, and that he should come at a certain day when everyone had gone to bed. The farmer then went back home and felt that he had improved things. He went back to Fell at the specified time and found the priest up and ready to go. The farmer then saw a grey horse standing to the north of the churchyard with a harness and bridle. The priest went up to the horse and climbed on and told the farmer to sit right behind him.

"But I warn you," said the priest, "not to say a word whatever appears or happens, for if you fail this it will cost you your life."

The priest then set off with the farmer at his back, and the farmer was amazed at how fast the horse went. They took the shortest way over the water past

Dalatá and Siglunes and steered north towards Ólafsfjarðarmúla. The farmer thought that he had had enough, and when the horse once seemed to trip and took a great dive the farmer became afraid and cried out. The priest then said, "Hold your tongue, he slipped on a skate," And that has since been an figure of speech when a horse stumbles or loses its footing, "It slipped on a skate". There's nothing more to say of their journey until they came to land north of Ólafsfjarðarmúla where there are great steep cliffs. The priest dismounted and so did the farmer. The priest went up to the cliff face and picked up a little twig. He held it up to the cliff and after a while the cliff opened and two women dressed in blue came out leading Jón's wife between them. She had become almost unrecognizable and unlike what she had been before, swollen and blue in appearance and most like a troll. The mark of the cross stood out on her forehead in the right skin colour, the Rev. Hálfðan later said when asked that that had been the baptismal cross, and that one mark she had from her former life.

When the woman had come out of the cliff she spoke to her husband and said, "You've come, Jón, and what do you want with me?"

The farmer was at a loss for words and the priest asked him if he wanted to have his wife, or whether he wanted to speak with her. The farmer refused. The priest then showed the women back into the cliff and closed it after them and arranged it around the door so that no one would have any further trouble from those women. Though the Rev. Hálfðan later said that he'd never intended to deal with those that had gone in, only those that had come out. That has since been called *Hálfðanahurð* ("Hálfðan's door") north in Ólafsfjarðarmúla where the Rev. Hálfðan closed the cliff. Truthful men say that it is red in colour and unlike the rest of the cliff and that near it are many other doors, even below it, with which the Rev. Hálfðan has done nothing.

The farmer and the priest went back the same way and came to Fell before people were on their feet. They dismounted at the same place that they had mounted north of the churchyard and the priest took the bridle off the grey horse, and as he took the bridle off he slapped him on the loins. The horse didn't like that and kicked at the priest with his back feet, but the priest ducked and the blow landed on the churchyard wall and his hoof made a gap or nook. It's said this gap has never been filled no matter what trick has been used to fix it up. It's said that no harm has come to anyone in Malmey since no one has been bold enough to be there longer than twenty

years. (Árnason 1954 I 501-502⁴)

This legend has been recorded in several variants by Jón Árnason, (Árnason 1954 III 533-535⁵) all of which include the journey on horseback with the warning not to speak. In some variants the farmer is specifically told not to pray or mention the name of God. This has probably come from the same motif in variants of the migratory legend ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil", although the horse here is not identified with the Devil. The earliest variant of this legend was recorded in the seventeenth century by Jón Eggertsson.

A priest named Jón lived near Eyjafjörður. He had a post at Svalbarður's church and another in Glæsibæ, so the fjord was between them. One winter it happened that he couldn't cross the fjord due to bad weather. He took an unfamiliar grey horse that came along by chance one morning and put his saddle and bridle on it and mounted it to ride to the church. At that moment a poor boy came to him and asked if he would let him ride behind him as he was from the other side on Svalbarðsströnd and wanted to cross back over the fjord. The priest said, "I will ride this horse directly over the fjord as I know he is a good water-horse and you can't come with me unless you promise not to say a word." The boy agreed and climbed on behind the priest. The priest rode out across the fjord and the boy thought the horse ran on the sea as on flat ground. But when they came to the middle the horse's back foot slipped. Then the boy cried out and almost fell off. Then the priest grabbed him and held him with one hand and they came unharmed up on dry land.

Then the priest said to the boy, "You almost brought harm to us both, as would have happened if you'd spoken a word."

The boy said, "I was afraid when the horse slipped."

The clerk said, "It was no wonder that his foot might slide a little for he slipped there on a skate."

He unsaddled the horse by the sea and took off the

⁴ Recorded by Jón of Gautlönd

⁵ Including variants from Sléttuhlíð and Skagafjórð

bridle, and the horse ran out onto the fjord and dived into the water. (Einarsson 1955 p.15-16)

Another account from the seventeenth century tells that the Rev. Hálfðan had a horse which carried enough turf in one day to build a wall around the churchyard. This resembles the myth of the building of Asgard's wall from "Gylfaginning" in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda. The horse in this legend is identified as "Nennir", an Icelandic water-horse. (Ibid. p.13-14) Accounts of water-horses being forced to haul stones have also been recorded in Scotland (Gregor 1874 p.24) At the end of the legend the horse is said to have kicked a piece out of the churchyard wall as happened in the Malmey legend.

The legend "the Woman of Malmey" combines a number of popular motifs from Icelandic folklore. The horse was first encountered to the north of a churchyard. In Norse legend north was generally associated with death and the dead, and it might not be stretching this legend too far to describe it as a journey to the land of the dead. The description of the farmer's wife as "swollen and blue" is traditional for Icelandic ghosts. For example in Grettir's Saga (XXXII) Grettir wrestled a ghost named Glám who was described as "Blue as Hel and big as a bull". (Jónsson 1946 VI p.109) Hel was the Norse goddess of the dead and, by extension, this phrase could be translated as "blue as death". The two women who led her out of the cliff were both dressed in blue. This matches the description of a pagan prophetess in Eiríks Saga Rauða (IV) (Jónsson 1946) and witches in Icelandic tales are often named *Blákápa*, or "Blue-coat". It could be argued whether the women in this legend are to be regarded as witches, ghosts or trolls. In another similar legend the Rev. Eiríkur summoned all of the spirits "of the earth, out of the earth and out of the sea" to recover a woman who had disappeared in the Westmann Islands. (Árnason 1954 I p.556-

558⁶) Unlike Hálfðan the Rev. Eiríkur succeeded in rescuing the woman. In both legends the wizards are presented confronting supernatural beings on behalf of others. In this respect they resemble the legends told about Sæmundur the Wise, but the trolls, or spirits in these legends are not associated with the Devil, although the mark of the baptismal cross left on the woman of Malmey's forehead suggests that the women were regarded as un-Christian if not explicitly anti-Christian.

Most of the legends about Sæmundur the Wise from the seventeenth century were recorded around Oddi in Rangarvellir district. This was the one district in Iceland which was entirely free of the witchcraft trials in that century. (Einarsson 1955 p.cxviii) It is possible that Sæmundur's popularity in that area promoted a more lenient attitude towards magic which in turn helped the legends to survive, although in the nineteenth century more legends were recorded about Sæmundur in the west of the country. This could have led to a conflict of attitudes and beliefs which is reflected in one legend involving both Sæmundur the Wise and the Rev. Hálfðan.

Once the Rev. Hálfðan followed Sæmundur from the Alþing (the Icelandic parliament) and caught up with him by lake Sandklufavatn and said, "You have an evil familiar, brother, a dark raven out of Niflheim, and now I mark you with his mark," and hit him on the cheek and eye then rode off to the north. Sæmundur could never see well out of that eye again. (Árnason 1954 I p.503⁷)

The word "*fylgja*" (from the verb meaning "to follow") which I have translated as "familiar" is more properly a form of *doppelgänger* or guardian spirit. They were sometimes presented in early Norse legends as a manifestation of a

⁶ Recorded by Brynjólfur of Minnanúp

⁷ Recorded by Guðbrandur Vigfússon

person's soul, and would often appear as animals. Niflheim was the old Norse underworld, or land of the dead. The reference to the raven and the loss of vision in one eye both suggest an association with Óðinn, the one eyed god of magic who had two ravens as messengers and servants. Early Christian writings in Iceland often associated pagan gods with the Devil. The implication here seems to be associating Sæmundur with demonic forces, possibly in reference to the fact that he had learned his magic from the Devil.

In his study of north Norwegian legends Stein Mathisen noted that magical knowledge acquired from the Devil was often transmitted in a written form compiled into books of magic. (Mathisen 1991 p.12) Such books were a common feature of late medieval demonology, and they are also prominent in the Icelandic wizard legends. In Iceland, however, books of magic were more often acquired not from the Devil but from the dead. In the seventeenth century Jón Eggertsson identified four of these books as "Grænskinna, Gulskinna, Rauðskinna and Silfra" (Green-skin, Yellow-skin, Red-skin and Silver referring to the colour of their bindings). (Einarsson 1955 p.lxxxiii) Rauðskinna was said to have been buried with its original owner and compiler Bishop Gottskálk the Grimm, and the others have been lost. Two other books, both called Gráskinna, or "grey-skin", appeared about this time, one said to have been compiled by the Rev. Eiríkur, (Árnason 1954 I p.544⁸) and the other by Guðbjartur Flóki. (Ibid. I p.493⁹) The most common story of how a wizard acquired his book of knowledge is also told about Eiríkur.

When Eiríkur was at school at Skálholt, a number of boys decided to raise the ghost of an old man buried in the churchyard there, who had once owned a magic book of

⁸ Recorded by Brynjólf of Minnanúp. Jón Árnason describes this as a "mis-statement"

⁹ Recorded by the Rev. Skúli Gislason

great power. They raised and cornered him eventually, but none of them could shift the book from under his arm until Eiríkur went up to him, when the book came loose at once. Eiríkur read in it till a little before dawn. Then he closed it and gave it back to its owner, who seized it and sank into his grave at once. Later the other boys asked him what he had read.

"Enough," he said, "to know that if I had read any further I would have lost my soul to the Devil."
(Benedikz 1964)

Two other variants of this legend have been recorded in which Eiríkur only manages to get hold of a single page. (Árnason 1954 I 543-545¹⁰) Another legend claims that the Rev. Eiríkur strangled an old man in order to get his book of magic, (Ibid. III p.499¹¹) but Árnason points out that this is supposed to have happened in the Westfjords where Eiríkur was never known to have been. He suggests that Eiríkur may have been confused with the Rev. Snorri Bjarnason, about whom the same tale is also told. (Ibid. I p.651¹²) The question may seem moot, but it is interesting to note that at least one researcher felt it necessary to point out that this legend is inconsistent with Eiríkur's character. (This same account claims that Eiríkur had studied at the Black School.) The legend about raising a ghost to obtain his book of magic has also been told about other wizards.

Sæmundur had heard from his good friend Jón that he planned to get a book which they both knew had been buried in Skálholt's churchyard with its owner. Jón had also let his girlfriend know about it. Sæmundur gave him some advice and told Jón not to deviate from it. So Jón went to Skálholt, went in the church, closed the door, and, believing no one nearby, recited three verses. With that the graves in the yard opened. Jón recited another verse and everyone came out of their

¹⁰ Recorded by Brynjólf in Minnanúp and the Rev. Þorstein Þórarinnsson

¹¹ Recorded by Rúnólfur of Vík

¹² In the notes

graves and into the church. Before the rest came an old man with grey hair and he sat in the front pew with a book in his hand. Jón recited a verse a third time and the book opened. But at the same time it happened that Jón's girlfriend shouted. As has been said, she knew of his intention and out of curiosity had gone into the church, without Jón knowing, to find out what might happen, and hid in the choir. A ghost had now stepped on her and broken her thigh and she shouted as has been said. With that noise there was a great racket in the church. Jón then ran to the bell rope and rang it, and all those that had come now disappeared with a great din and went back to their graves, and Jón lost the book. (Ibid. I p.473¹³)

This variant was recorded in the seventeenth century by Arni Magnusson. A similar account was later recorded in a much longer form concerning the wizard Magic-Loftur. Loftur Þorsteinsson was a student at the cathedral school at Hólar at the beginning of the eighteenth century. He is reported to have tried to raise the ghost of Bishop Gottskálk in order to get hold of the book Red-skin. Loftur claimed that having practised magic he had lost his soul to the Devil "but if a man knows enough then the Devil has no further power over the man, rather he must serve him without getting anything in return as he served Sæmundur the Wise." Loftur enlisted the aid of another student to pull the bell rope when Loftur had got hold of the book, but the assistant panicked and rang the bell too early, banishing the ghosts. (Ibid. I p.572-574¹⁴)

This legend has international parallels. In Scotland a similar account was told about the reformer John Knox. "He was accused of attempting to raise *some sanctis* in the churchyard of St. Andrews, among whom Satan himself started up, having a huge pair of horns on his head, at which terrible sight Knox's secretary became mad, and died." (Sharpe 1884 p.47) Over a century earlier in France in 1410

¹³ From Arni Magnusson's collection

¹⁴ Recorded by the Rev. Skúli Gislason from Páll Ólafson

a notary, Gérard Cassendri, had been accused of invoking demons. A witness stated that "he had conjured up some demons by reading from a book; whereupon many demons appeared - though they disappeared again when the witness, understandably alarmed, threw a shoe at them." (Cohn 1975 p.196) Although there is no book of magic in this account like the legends of Loftur and Jón it does involve spirits being summoned and a witness responding in some way that breaks the spell. Both of these accounts clearly reflect the belief in demonology, which the Icelandic variants lack.

The Icelandic legends have another possible parallel in Faroese folklore. This is the legend of how Guttormur of Múle, "the most powerful wizard in the Faroes," gained his magic. "A priest in Ónagerð lay dying and asked that at his death all of his books should be cast into the sea. A servant woman went out on the cape with the books and threw them out to sea. Guttormur then lay fishing by the rocks. He pulled the books out of the sea, took them home and then had them to read." (Jakobsen c.1900 p.128) This legend may be related to a story from France about St. Dominic. "One day when St. Dominic was crossing a river on the outskirts of Toulouse, his books fell in the water. Then, three days later a fisherman, having cast his line in this place, thought that he had caught a heavy fish, and he pulled up the saint's books out of the water, as intact as if they had been carefully kept in a cupboard." (Le Golf 1988 p.345) In any case this account, like the two quoted above, lacks the motif which the Icelandic and Faroese legends share, that of the books of magic obtained from a dead man.

The idea that magic could be acquired from books may have been influenced by late medieval demonology, but it was consistent with Icelandic beliefs. The written word implied literacy, which required an education. In Iceland, where the sagas continued to be read and were regarded as historically accurate, the old knowledge found in books may have been felt

to have a greater authority than contemporary tradition. (Hastrup 1990 b p.193) Magic, in particular, was often associated with old, even pagan, times.

The belief that magic abilities could be acquired from the dead had parallels in other Icelandic legends. It plays a part in the legend of the Rev. Magnús Pétursson.

Magnús, who was later priest at Hörgslandi, was thought to be well gifted and intelligent in his youth, so he was sent to be educated at the school at Skálholt. But the first winter that he was there he was laughed at by all the rest because he had quickly lost his gift for learning without any cause. His teachers thought that he was unlike what had previously been said about him. For this reason he was regarded as having little worth.

A student named Sigurður was most highly regarded for his outstanding talents at that time there in the school. He had fallen deeply in love with a girl who was there at that place, but she would by no means accept him. He was so grieved by this that he killed himself. His body was then carried to the church and as was then the custom someone had to watch over him during the night. That fell to Magnús who went out to the church in the evening expecting to keep watch. But when a third of the night had gone by he saw that the coffin moved and the ghost rose up and took off its shroud and left it behind and went out of the church. Magnús knew nothing more about him, but he had an idea while the ghost was gone. He took up a string that he found and lay it across the casket, then took the shroud.

After a while the ghost appeared and said, "Give me my shroud, Mangi."

"I won't do that," he said, "unless you tell me what you were doing tonight when you went out."

"I was," said the ghost, "with my girl. I intended to enjoy her dead since I couldn't while I was alive."

Then said Magnús, "Did you kill her?"

"You can call it that," said the ghost. "Now, give me my shroud, Mangi."

"I won't do that unless you tell me how the girl can be revived," said Magnús.

"That's of little value," said the ghost, "and it doesn't matter to me though I tell you. The way to do it is to lay her in bed and lie with her and stroke her with warm hands since I hid all of her life under one of her little toes. Now give me my shroud, Mangi."

"I won't do that," said Magnús, "unless you tell me how it was that I lost all of my talent when I came here in the autumn."

"The Devil took it from you," said the ghost, "so that you shouldn't succeed in becoming a priest."

"Tell me," said Magnús, "what you would have been."

"I was to be a priest," said the ghost, "and I should have been married three times."

"You've done poorly to kill yourself," said Magnús.

"That's true, Mangi," said the ghost. "Now give me my shroud."

"I'll never do that," said Magnús, "unless you give me some of those gifts that you had in life."

"Do you dare to lie beneath me?" said the ghost.

"Yes," said Magnús. Then he lay down, and the ghost on top of him.

Then he blew a cloud down into Magnús and asked if it was enough. He said it wasn't. Then the ghost blew again and asked whether that was enough. But Magnús said it wasn't and asked him to blow a third time.

"Then you may beware," said the ghost, "for inspiration follows that great blast and if you survive or resist it then you will have enough great wisdom."

Magnús said he would risk it. Then the ghost blew into him a third time such a great blast that Magnús lost consciousness until the dawn when the men revived him. He was then chosen to sing at the burial. He was an exceptional singer. Everyone wondered at what a beautiful voice Magnús had gotten, they all thought it sounded like Sigurður's voice. (Árnason 1954 III p.557-558¹⁵)

"Mangi" is a common diminutive of the name Magnús. Different variants of this legend disagree as to the identity of the ghost. (Ibid. III p.554+555-557) The interesting thing to note here is that talent, like life, was regarded as a thing which could be stolen or passed on, or hidden underneath someone's little toe. The idea that magic knowledge would be transferred in the form of a book was a later addition.

Ghosts could also be summoned for other reasons as well. Primarily they could be used as *sendings* and sent to attack a wizard's enemies. Jón Árnason gives an extensive formula for summoning *sendings* in his collection of Icelandic folklore. (Árnason 1954 I p.304-306) This consists primarily

¹⁵ Recorded by Sigfús of Skjögrastað

of raising a ghost in the churchyard, then wrestling with it. Wrestling with ghosts is a familiar motif from Icelandic folklore; it should be noted that the ghosts appear in the flesh and not just as disembodied spirits. If the wizard defeats the ghost then he can command it to attack whomever he wishes.

There was a man in Árskógströnd named Pétur. He lived in the nineteenth century and died old. He was one-eyed and had a large beam (cataract) in the other eye which he got early in life as a result, as the story says, of having begun to learn magic. And when he thought that he had learned it completely he wanted to try his skill and wake up a ghost. He went in the dark of night to try this in a churchyard at Stærri-Árskóg. Every one was asleep at the place and every thing was still. Pétur now set about doing everything that had been set down and after a long invocation a ghost rose up. It appeared rather hideous to Pétur but he raised up his courage to support him, but it worked out so unfortunately that it was his mother that he'd woken up. The old woman quickly got her strength up, kicked about with her feet and cursed her son mercilessly. They now got hold of each other and she became angrier the longer they wrestled.

The story now turns to the priest at the place. He woke up in his bed in the night and through his wisdom he knew that something was happening in the churchyard. He quickly dressed and went out. He then saw Pétur and the old woman wrestling and went towards them. Pétur was by then exhausted. When the old woman saw the priest she spat in her son's eye, let him go and disappeared. From the old woman's spit Pétur later got the cataract in his eye. (Ibid. I p.321¹⁶)

It is interesting to note that the ghost was unprepared to face the priest and "his wisdom". Pétur's loss of sight in one eye may have suggested an association with Óðinn. As in the legend of Sæmundur and Hálfðan this would imply that the wizard was engaged in demonic magic, although he was not explicitly involved in summoning demons. This apparent

¹⁶ Recorded by Benedikt of Brjánskæk as told in Eyjafjörður

condemnation is reinforced by the fact that it was his own mother's ghost which he raised, a clear violation of proper filial piety. A similar motif appears in another legend where a more experienced wizard was more successful.

A man named Snorri lived at Stóru-Háeri and went once east to Parti. There's nothing to say of his trip until he had come to Stokkseyri. That was in the middle of the night by the moonlight. He saw one person, or possibly two, in the churchyard there. He didn't get involved in this and went down to the sea and out along the coast. When he had come a good way out from Stokkseyri, almost out to Hraunsá, he turned from the sea up onto the plains. Then he saw two fire balls hurl with great speed out along the banks until they were out of sight. Shortly after it was said that Dís of Stokkseyri had woken up a pair of twins and sent them west to the Westfjords. (Ibid. I p.566)

In a footnote to this legend Jón Árnason comments that "Some say that it had been her two children that she had starved to death." A mother starving her children to death is a violation of proper family relations comparable to a son raising his mother's ghost and both reinforce the impression that the wizards were practising unnatural or forbidden magic.

A close parallel to the Icelandic *sendings* can be found in belief that demonologists could summon demons and command them to attack their enemies. This is one of the oldest motifs associated with demonology. It can be found in the legend of Cyprian of Antioch from the fourth century. The oldest surviving Icelandic reference to Cyprian is from the late seventeenth century (Einarsson 1955 p.cviii) but his legend had been translated from the Greek by Jacobus de Voragine and included in his Legenda Aurea (Palmer and More 1966 p.42) and would have been widely known throughout Europe from the end of the thirteenth century.

The earliest account of a *sending* occurs in the version of Ólafssaga Tryggvasonar (CLXVIII-CLXXIV) from Flateyjarbók compiled at the end of the fourteenth century, during the

period when demonology was prominent in European beliefs and gaining in popularity. In this account the pagan Earl Hakon carved a human figure out of a driftwood log, then killed a man and put his heart inside the figure. He then clothed the figure and magically "strengthened" it, so that it could walk and talk, and sent it to slay his enemy the poet Þorleifur. (Simpson 1973 p.178-179) This may be related to an account in Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda written early in the thirteenth century. In "Skáldskaparmál" (XXIV) the giants make a man out of clay and place an animal's heart inside it, then leave it to defend them against the god Þór. A similar figure from Saami legend, called a Stallo, could be fashioned from peat or other materials and sent to wrestle and kill a wizard's enemies, but these legends are fairly recent and have probably been influenced by Norse traditions. (Collinder 1949 p.183-185) The Stallo is more generally portrayed as an evil spirit of the forest demon. (Karsten 1955 p.53)

The practice of "sitting out to wake up trolls or land spirits" as a form of divination was documented in the twelfth century. (It will be discussed in the fourth chapter.) Kirsten Hastrup has suggested that these spirits only became associated with the dead under the influence of Christian imagery, but this is not consistent with the evidence from early Norse mythology. In the poem "Baldrs Draumar" from the Elder Edda the god Óðinn summoned the spirit of a dead prophetess to recite the past and future. This was not likely to be a product of Christian influence. The description of a *sending* in Olafssaga may have been influenced by accounts of demonologists, which had been interpreted in the context of native Norse beliefs. It can't be said when *sendings* were first identified as ghosts. The first such reference is from the first quarter of the seventeenth century when Jón Rögnvaldsson was tried and executed for having woken up a ghost which killed some horses and attacked a boy. (Hastrup 1990(a) p.216-217)

Very few of the legends involving *sendings* actually depict the ghost being summoned and sent. More often the wizard encounters a sending which has been sent against him. This did not always involve magic, often the sendings could be tricked or outwitted.

A woman sat on a platform at her work. She was alone on the farm as the farmer had gone somewhere and the farmhands had all gone off in their own directions. A rather short but sturdy boy came in. He asked where the farmer was and she wasn't too quick to answer as she suspected something, rather she asked him what he wanted with him. The boy said he had to find him and find him promptly. She said she didn't think he had so much to do with him as he was so small. The boy said he could become bigger. The woman asked him to show her. The boy started growing and she never agreed that he was big enough until he reached the roof beam. Then she said he should go back the same way and asked him to show her how small he could get. Then he got increasingly smaller until he was as small as a bunting. Then she took up a glass and asked him if he could become so small that he could get inside it. Then he turned himself into a fly and flew down into the glass, and she wasn't slow in putting a caul over it. The fool had to make himself comfortable there. When the farmer came back the woman gave him the glass and told him that he had been sent what was in it. He took the glass and left with it. No one knows what happened to it after that.

The people in Borgafjörður end the story in this way:

When the farmer took the glass he was pleased with his wife's clever trick and he thanked her sincerely. He took the glass out to the smithy, he was a good smith. He then took an iron stump, flattened it and made a cylinder out of it. He put the glass with the *sending* in it into the cylinder and closed both ends of the iron cylinder. That done he heated up the cylinder in the forge and beat on it with his hammer on the anvil. He continued that until he thought that the iron cylinder was completely welded together and beaten. He then made a scythe and had that iron welded together in the blade. He then used that scythe himself and thought it bit surprisingly well. But no one might touch that scythe except the farmer and he used it to the last.

And now the story is finished. (Árnason 1954 I p.323¹⁷)

The latter part of this legend may be based on a migratory tale-type AT 330B "The Devil in the Knapsack (bottle, cask)". The trick used to get the sending into the glass is a common international motif and it occurs in several Icelandic legends including one concerning Sæmundur the Wise and the Devil. (Ibid. I p.479¹⁸) *Sendings* could be dealt with in other ways as well. They could be wrestled as in Grettissaga, or, in one legend a wizard-priest laid a *sending* by serving it the holy mass. (Ibid. III p.562-3¹⁹) These legends can be fitted into the larger genre of ghost layings.

There was a woman named Guðrún, now commonly called Gunna. She was bad tempered and unfriendly so that no one wanted to have her near them. Therefore she lived alone in a house on Reykjanes called Grænutóft. A farmer living by the harbour had lent her a pot one winter and came in the spring to fetch it. Gunna insulted the farmer and wouldn't let go of the pot so in the end the farmer went home without it. He needed to have the pot, however, since no one could lend him one, so he went back to Gunna, but before he left he asked some men to check on him if he was away long. They agreed. The farmer didn't come home that evening and there was a search for him the next morning, but he couldn't be found. They came to Grænutóft and found Gunna lying dead in her bed, as blue as Hel and swollen. They wrapped her in the bed clothes and left her lying there. On the way home they found the farmer a short way off the path, killed and torn apart. The pot was with him broken in pieces. They carried the farmer's body home and he was buried. A coffin was built for Gunna and she was taken in it from Grænutóft to Kirkjvóg, but on the way some men thought they saw her

¹⁷ Recorded by Páll Pálsson from Sveinbjörn Guðmundsson the conclusion was recorded by Magnús Grímsson "from a common tale in Borgafjörð"

¹⁸ Recorded by Magnús Grímsson "from a common tale in Borgafjörð"

¹⁹ Recorded by Markús Gíslason

dancing in front of the procession. The coffin was now buried, but Gunna walked about as a grey cat, and no one was safe from her. The priest Eiríkur at Vogsós was then sent for. He gave the messenger a scarf and told him to give it to Gunna and tell her to wash it. The messenger went and took the scarf to Gunna and as he threw it to her said, "You have to wash that."

"Who says so?" said Gunna.

"Eiríkur at Vogsós," he said.

She was taken aback and said, "I couldn't have expected worse."

She left immediately and went to the hot spring at Reykjanes and cast one end of the scarf in, and it stuck fast in the spring, but she couldn't let go of the other end. She has since been walking in a circle around the spring and she's now said to have walked herself up to her knees. Nowadays the spring is called "Gunna". (Árnason 1954 III 510²⁰)

Several variants of this legend have been recorded (Ibid. I p.563 and III p.508-511) and it is similar to another legend told about the priest and poet Þorlákur Þórarinnsson of Ós. In this account it is said that the Rev. Magnús Einarsson from Tjörn later found the ghost bound by her heel and banished her permanently. (Árnason 1862 III p.588²¹)

The practice of laying ghosts was also widely known in England and legends very similar to these have been well documented by Theo Brown in the West Country of Devon and Cornwall. Although lay persons, known as cunning-men, could lay ghosts, parsons were preferred for these exorcisms, especially if they had been educated at Oxford and could speak to the ghost in Latin (Greek, Hebrew and Arabic were also used.) "The main point is that any exceptionally well-educated man who was ordained and happened to find himself serving in a remote village would be reckoned by his parishioners to possess fabulous occult powers which he

²⁰ Recorded by Brynjólf of Minnanúp

²¹ Recorded by Björn of Finnstöð from Jón of Yztafell

could, if he wished, use on behalf of his flock." (Brown, T. 1979 p.52) Legends of these cunning-parsons include motifs from the migratory legend ML 3020: "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book". One legend, concerning a layman John Minterne, claims that when he realized that he'd left his books open in his study he turned his horse and spurred it so violently that it became airborne, (Ibid.) combining motifs from both the migratory legends ML 3020 and 3025: "Carried by the Devil", although without the explicit element of demonology.

Other legends which have not been identified elsewhere as migratory legends are also shared between Iceland and England. For example one tale told in Devon tells that "Parson Harris, who was a kindly man, brought from Exeter the lover of his servant-maid, who was pining for him. The girl was so upset and dispirited that the parson agreed to cast his spells, even though it was Sunday. Nothing happened at first and the girl went to bed disappointed. But at dawn she heard a knocking at the door and found her young man standing there, breathless, perspiring and jacketless. He had run all the way from Exeter. The reason for the delay was that all through Sunday he had worn his best jacket with his prayer book in the pocket, and the spells would not work until he had taken it off." (Whitlock 1977 p.43) In Iceland this legend is told about the Rev. Eiríkur.

A man who had gone fishing stayed for the night at Vogsós. He was very sad. Eiríkur called him aside and asked him what was wrong. He was reluctant, but finally said that his sweetheart had broken up with him before he'd left and he asked Eiríkur for help. He replied that that was impossible.

In the evening Eiríkur saw that each man had his own bed and was himself the last one up. There was a knock at the door and Eiríkur went to answer it. There was a girl in only a shirt and her underwear and dripping wet, since it was raining. She greeted the priest and asked to stay the night, saying that she was near death from the cold. He had her come in and asked how she happened to be out.

She said, "I went out in the evening half undressed

because I wanted to know whether the wash had been taken in when the rain started. I started out for where it was usually hung, but got confused in the dark and finally ended up here.

Eiríkur said "This is a bad time. The houses is full and there's nowhere for you unless you'll join the man up there in that bed," and pointed to the traveller who was lying very still.

She said she would rather do that than die from the cold. She went up to the man and he recognized his sweetheart and she him. She was with him that night and they got along well together. They later married and had a good marriage. (Árnason 1954 I p.552)

Another possibly related account occurs in the thirteenth century Egilssaga (LIX) when the pagan Queen Gunnhild used her magic to call up a storm summoning Egill to York against his will and wrecking his ship. (Jónsson 1946 II p.180-181) The association between such magic and pagan, or at least non-Christian magic is supported by the English variant of the legend. The comment that the parson worked his spells although it was Sunday suggests that the practice of magic was seen as inconsistent with Christian worship, and the prayer book in the man's pocket was seen as a defense against these spells. This makes the role of the parson even more surprising. It should not be presumed that these legends were regarded as purely fictitious. Formulas for summoning people have been recorded in England in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where they were usually performed by young women wishing their lovers to appear. (Hole 1973 p.91)

The most comprehensive study of the practice of magic in England has been Keith Thomas's Religion and the Decline of Magic. Like Brown, Thomas paid special attention to the role of the wizard-priest. He pointed out that many practices had existed within the medieval church which could be regarded as magical such as the use of holy water in exorcisms and blessings. Even accepted church rituals such as the baptism and the celebration of the Mass readily attracted popular

superstitions. These beliefs were frequently refuted by the church, but their arguments were often too subtle or complicated to be understood by the laity. (Thomas 1971 p.25-50) Under these circumstances it should not be surprising that the medieval church might be regarded as a source of magical powers or, as Thomas says, "the roles of the priest and the magician were by no means clearly distinguished in the popular mind." (Ibid. p.274)

The confusion of magic and religion could date back to the introduction of Christianity to northern Europe when many elements of pre-Christian magic were assimilated into Christian practice. Under instruction from Pope Gregory the Great the early missionaries often reconsecrated pagan temples as Christian churches and reinterpreted pagan celebrations as Christian holidays. In the same way many sacred wells and mounds were allowed to retain their magic properties under the auspice of a Christian saint. Thomas has suggested that the early converts came to look to Christianity for many of the same magical functions which had been served by their pre-Christian faiths. (Ibid. p.47-48) At the same time early Christian literature such as the lives of the saints related the miraculous achievements of holy men. When the early missionaries drove out the pagan devils they were claiming a greater power over the elves and spirits of traditional belief. Many conversions were likely assisted by the belief that the convert was gaining access to a new and more powerful form of magic, and such legends remained popular throughout the middle ages. (Ibid. p.25-26) During the Reformation anything which could be interpreted as magical was flatly rejected by the protestant churches, but often these practices and beliefs have proved hard to suppress. (Ibid. p.51-78 also p.253-279) This point is echoed by Alan MacFarlane in his study of magic in Essex when he suggested that after the Reformation many "cunning-folk" took up many of the magical activities which had previously been

performed by the clergy. (MacFarlane 1970 p.130)

Thomas also mentions the practice of clergy and cunning men laying ghosts, (Ibid. p.593-594) but he chooses to emphasize the role and functions of the ghosts, prophesying, confessing or accusing. (Ibid. p.596-597) All of these actions involve informing the living, and are closer to the legends of knowledge gained from the dead. As well as laying ghosts the wizards could be called upon to deal with other types of supernatural beings. Several legends have been recorded, like "The Woman of Malmey", in which wizards confront trolls or rescue people from spirits or elves.

At Sandur for a long time there lived a man named Arnþór. In his own time he was thought to be one of the most reliable specialists, or wizards, and he was often sought out by people from the neighbouring country to lay ghosts and other such. And one time it happened at Hólar in Laxárdalur that a child disappeared over the winter so they sent a message down to Arnþór and asked what had become of the child. Arnþór then went up to Hólar and the child's mother bade him bring her child back. He was there for the night. There are some very beautiful rock or cliffs there, smooth at the front and majestic. Arnþór was there over the night and in the morning the mother asked after the child. He said he knew where the child was, but it wasn't possible to get it back for it had been so enchanted that it could never be cared for by men again. She asked what it would cost to bring the child back. He was there a second night. In the morning he said he could get the child, but it couldn't be gotten alive, and she said that she would rather have the body than that it be left with the elves. So he was there a third night, and then he went up to the rocks and demanded the child. Then the rocks opened and a woman came out bearing the child on her arm. He demanded the child again. She hit it against the rocks so that its brains ran out, then cast the body to Arnþór. He brought it back to the mother and she took it gladly and rewarded him. (Árnason 1954 I p.595²²)

This legend resembles the "Woman of Malmey" except that

²² Recorded by Jón Borgfirðingur as told by Björn Jóhannesson of Finnstaður in Kinn

the supernatural being is clearly identified as an elf (Icelandic "álfur"). The magician seems to gain his knowledge at night, possibly through prophetic dreams. Arnþór was said to have learned his magic from a "hidden-woman" (an elf) who lived in a rock in the mountains. He lived in the nineteenth century, and this could be regarded as a late development in the wizard tradition, but another wizard from the seventeenth century, Þorleifur Þorðarson, was also said to have gained his magic from the elves.

A man named Þorleifur was Þorður's son. He was born at the highest farm at Tungur or Hreppir. When he was in his first year, or one year old, and lay in his cradle, a young girl once came to his mother, who sat next to the child. The girl greeted the woman and asked her to help her mother as she was lying in bed and couldn't move. The woman said she couldn't leave the child. The girl said she would stay by it in the meantime. The woman followed the girl's directions across the field. Then she came to a hill at the foot of the field and there was a door open in the hill. The woman went in and came to where a woman lay on the floor. She greeted her and helped her. When she had washed the child and slit the cord she went home again. She then saw that the strange girl was having great fun playing with the child in the cradle, and a laugh fell from the child. When Þorleifur's mother came in the girl left at once. (Árnason 1862 I p.505²³)

This is a variant of the migratory legend ML 5070: "Midwife to the Fairies". In most variants of this legend the woman who acts as midwife receives a gift in return for her services. This may be related to one seventeenth century account which claimed that the female wizard Halla of Straumfjörður learned her magic "in a mound", but unfortunately the details are not given. (Einarsson 1955 p.lxxxiv)

As well as mediating with supernatural beings the wizards could also defend or protect the community from more

²³ Recorded by Magnús Grímsson

human threats. One legend tells how the Rev. Eiríkur raised a wind which drove a pirate ship near Selvog out to sea. The pirates in question were Basque or Spanish whalers who had taken to raiding and slave-trading in the sixteenth century. They were generally referred to as "Turks" and posed a serious threat to the coastal population of Iceland at least through the beginning of the seventeenth century. Eiríkur is said to have raised a ward of uncut stones at Selvog facing out to sea. (Árnason 1954 I p.561-562)

Another time the Turks came to Krisuvíkuberg, and climbed up there where has since been called Ræningjastíg ("Robber's-path"). There was a summer dairy at Selalda and the Turks went there, killed the dairy-maid, and chased the shepherd home to Krisuvík. It was Sunday and the Rev. Eiríkur was serving mass in the Krisuvík church. Some say that he was at the altar, and others more likely that he was in the pulpit when the shepherd came running into the church and shouted, "Turks have come and killed the dairy-maid and chased me here."

The priest said, "Will you let me go to the door, good men?"

They consented. Eiríkur went to the door and looked out and saw the Turks in the field. He said to them, "Go no further! Kill each other! Were it another day, or I otherwise disposed you would eat each other."

They fought there and all died, and it has since been called Orrustahól, or Ræningjahól ("Battle-field", "Robbers'-field") where they fought, and Ræningjaðúf ("Robbers'-mound") where they were buried. After that Eiríkur set up a ward on Arnafell and said before it, as with the other one, that while it stood the Turks should never destroy Krisuvík. That ward still stands. (Ibid. I p.562²⁴)

In his article "The Master Magician in Icelandic Folk-Legend" B.S. Benedikz produced an elaborate explanation based largely on conjecture of how the Rev. Eiríkur may have first gained his reputation as a wizard. He seemed to completely ignore the possibility that these legends may have been based

²⁴ Recorded by Brynjólf of Minnanúp from Selvog

on true accounts. There is no reason to believe that Eiríkur did not actually erect these "wards" which were said to be still standing in the nineteenth century.

In 1615 Jón Guðmundsson, "the learned", is reported to have composed several verses which raised a storm wrecking a pirate ship in the Westfjords. The next day the local men fought and killed the surviving pirates stranded on the shore, many of whom were too weak to even stand. (One pirate was said to have attacked an Icелander by biting his ankle.) (Ibid. III p.611²⁵) The poem which he composed cursing the pirates has been preserved along with another by which he had later laid a ghost on Snæfellsness peninsula. (Hastrup 1990 b p.202+219) Evidently this was an active belief. Around the middle of the same century Magnús of Hörgsland reportedly recited another poem which drove a pirate ship out to sea. (Árnason 1955 III p.554-555²⁶) Both of these men were known as *Kraptaskáld*, or power-scalds, meaning that they could work magic through composing and reciting poetry. Various writers have tended to exaggerate the distinction between the *kraptaskáld*, who appeared first in the fifteenth century, and the *galdramaður*, or wizard. This distinction is by no means clear and it will not be dealt with here.²⁷ In the Faroes the Rev. Peder Arbhoe was said to have raised a wind which drove a French pirate ship out to sea in the early eighteenth century. (West 1980 p.82) A letter has been preserved from the high bailiff Didrik Marcussen to the Rev. Arbhoe dated 1720 promising payment if he could dispell an enchantment preventing the slaughter of a school of whales. (Ibid. p.80)

A similar legend has been told in Shetland where the

²⁵ Recorded by Skuli Gislason as told by Einar Bjarnarson

²⁶ Recorded by Jón of Steinar

²⁷ The word "galdur", or magic, is derived from the verb "gala" meaning to chant.

witch Minna Baaba was reported to have wrecked a Spanish pirate ship which threatened the isle of Papa Stour. She was said to have climbed a flight of stairs, at the first step the wind rose and it grew stronger with each step until it became a hurricane as she reached the top step. (Warwick 1975 p.174-175²⁸) Another account was recorded in Mull where eighteen witches were required to sink a Spanish ship. (Campbell, J.G. 1902 p.27-30) In England Sir Francis Drake was reported to have used magic against the Spanish Armada. "Drake commanded a large baulk of timber and a hatchet to be brought. He then chopped the timber into short lengths tossing each into Plymouth sound, where it became a fireship; by this means he defeated the Spanish." (Witlock 1977 p.72) This is a variant of an legend from the Isle of Man in which Mananna caused a fleet to appear frightening away viking raiders, (Killip 1975 p.43) and it is probably not related to the legends from Iceland.

The legends of wizards driving away pirate ships should not be regarded as an entirely separate genre from the ghost layings and legends of wizards and elves. In a culture where the existence of ghosts and elves was widely believed the distinction between such supernatural beings and more realistic threats is not a necessary one. In her study of medieval Icelandic society Kirsten Hastrup has demonstrated that the basic opposition in the Icelandic world view was between the community and the outside "wild", which was populated by foreigners, or "outlanders", as well as by elves and ghosts. Outlaws, who had been driven out of the community, were often depicted taking on many of the same

²⁸ Told by George P.S. Paterson in 1974. This legend is also found in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies SA 1972/238/A5 recorded by Tadaoke Miyauke from Tom Anderson

characteristics as non-human trolls. (Hastrup 1990(a) p.37²⁹) In laying ghosts or warding against pirates the wizard-priest was using his magic to mediate on behalf of the community with these potentially hostile outsiders. In this context it is especially significant, as Keith Thomas has pointed out, that the priest was himself often an outsider who had been assigned to the local parish. In addition his special knowledge and the nature of his office set him apart from the rest of the community (Thomas 1971 p.32). This gave him an ambiguous status as an outsider within society. Claude Levi-Strauss made a similar point in his description of the role of the trickster in American Indian mythology, "Since his mediating function occupies a position halfway between two polar opposites, he must retain some of that duality." (Levi-Strauss 1968 p.225) It was through his association with elves, ghosts or the Devil that the wizard was able to confront these outside forces. Hastrup makes much the same point in a different context when she describes Grettir in relation to his fight with the ghost Glám. At this time Grettir was an outlaw, legally exiled from the community. "It's from this transgression of boundaries that Grettir draws his strength and his weakness. It takes a man like him to fight the evil forces threatening society, one who is able to meet these forces on common ground." (Hastrup 1990(a) p.157)

The wizards could also act within the community when social or moral boundaries had been transgressed. We can cite two examples of this.

It is said that once upon a time some peasants who were going to the trading-post passed by the home meadow of Vogsósar, and there met Eiríkur, who asked them to give him a piece of tobacco as he had run out of supplies. They all refused except one who cut the end

²⁹ From the article "Cosmology and Society in Medieval Iceland" p.25-43

off his roll and gave it to him. Eiríkur thanked him and said he need not regret this.

The trading party returned without incident and nothing more happened for some time. But during the following winter all the peasants seemed to have run out of tobacco surprisingly quickly, except for the one who had given Eiríkur a bite. His roll never seemed to get any shorter. This miserable state of affairs lasted until the spring ship arrived at the trading post with supplies, whereupon all the farmers rushed out to replenish their stock - except the generous one. Sure enough, they met Eiríkur at the edge of his meadow, and he asked them to give him a bite of tobacco. They told him that not one of them had tasted a bite of tobacco all winter, and that they were all in the direst straights. He let that pass.

Some time later while making his rounds of parochial visitations Eiríkur came to the house of the generous farmer, where, as always, he was hospitably received, and the farmer offered him tobacco.

"They tell me that you didn't buy any when all the others did this spring," said Eiríkur to him.

"No, I had no need to," the other answered. "My roll has lasted me all winter and spring without shrinking."

"Mm - yes," Eiríkur replied, "It was a good bit of tobacco."

A later rumour maintained that Eiríkur had revenged himself on the mean travellers by magically transferring their stocks of tobacco to the generous one's roll. (Benedikz 1964 p.27)

There are many similar legends in which the Rev. Eiríkur used his magic to reward generosity and chastise poor behaviour. Another legend involves Sæmundur the Wise.

Once Sæmundur the wise had a cow herd whom he thought was too foul mouthed and he criticized him often for this. He told the cow herd that the Devil had curses and the foul language of men as food for himself and his imps.

"I should never use foul language," said the cow herd, "If I knew that it would cost the Devil his daily bread."

"I'll soon find out whether you're serious or not," said Sæmundur.

He then put an imp in the cow shed. The cow herd was not pleased with this guest as the imp did everything he could to hurt or annoy him, and the cow herd had a hard time keeping himself from cursing. Some

time passed and he was pleased to see that the imp grew thinner with each day. The cow herd was happy to see this and never cursed. One morning when he came out to the cow shed he saw that everything was smashed and broken and all the cows tied together by their tails, and there were many of them. He turned to the imp who lay in wretchedness and misery in the stall and poured his anger out with innumerable curses and horrible foul language. Then he saw to his anger and annoyance that the imp now came to life and was all of a sudden so plump and well fed that it seemed he might run to fat. The cow herd then calmed himself down and stopped cursing and has never spoken a foul word since. The result is that the imp, who had to live off of his foul language, is now out of the story. - It would be best if you and I could follow the example of the cow herd. (Árnason 1954 I p.481)

The final comment makes it clear that this account was meant to be instructive or admonitory. A variant of this legend was also referred to in the seventeenth century where it was associated with another legend of Sæmundur's "soul-mate". (Einarsson 1955 p.48)

The Rev. Sæmundur had heard from old prophecies that he was meant to have a soul-fellowship with a cowherd at Hólar. He therefore took a trip north to Hólar. He hid in the cowshed while the cowherd was getting some hay, and went from stall to stall and cut the bonds of every bull, so they all went loose out of the stalls. So the cowherd came back and saw how things were, asked God's help and spoke no stronger words, got all of the bulls back into the stalls and left. Sæmundur went to the stalls again, cut all the bonds and let them all loose. The cowherd came back and saw again what was up, and asked God to help him more as more was happening. Sæmundur then revealed himself and was pleased with his soul-mate. (Ibid. p.42)

It is significant that in this legend Sæmundur was explicitly identified as a priest, as was relatively unusual in his legends. Omitting the trickster element his behaviour was entirely consistent with the role of a Christian priest. Like the Rev. Eiríkur he acted to reinforce the social norms of proper moral behaviour. This feature of the wizard's role

is also reflected in the legends about wizards and thieves.

The Rev. Eiríkur warned both the shepherds and other boys in Selvóg against taking his horses without his permission and said it would go poorly for them. As a result all the shepherds were careful not to touch his horses, but two boys failed in this. As soon as they mounted, the horses jumped and turned straight home to Selvóg and the boys couldn't control them. They tried to throw themselves off but they couldn't calm the horses down, and this wasn't possible as their breeches were stuck fast to the backs of the horses. "This is no use," said one of them. "We have to get loose of these horses or else we'll come into the hands of the Rev. Eiríkur, and that's not an enviable position." He then took his knife and cut the seat out of his breeches and with that came off the horses back. But the other either didn't have the means to do this trick, or else he wasn't willing to ruin his trousers.

The horses came home to Vogsós, one with the boy crying, and the other with the trouser seat stuck fast. The priest was outside when the horses came into the yard. He wiped the trouser seat off the loose horse and told the boy, "It's not good to steal the horses of the Rev. Eiríkur of Vogsós. Now get off and never take my horses without permission. Your friend was more resourceful than you and he ought to understand if he were shown a few runes as he's pretty good material." A little later the boy came to the priest. He showed him the trouser bottom and asked him whether he recognized it. The boy didn't react, but told the priest what had happened. The priest smiled and invited him in. He accepted with thanks. He was with the priest for a long time after that and followed him, and it's said that the priest taught him much of the old wisdom. (Árnason 1954 I p.548-549³⁰)

On the surface this might appear to be simply another account of the Rev. Eiríkur testing a potential apprentice. One variant of this legend even claimed that it was the same boy who appeared in ML 3020 "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book". (Ibid. III p.520-521³¹) However the central motif in

³⁰ Recorded by Magnús Grímsson "from a common tale in Borgafjörð"

³¹ Recorded by Rúnólfur of Vík

this legend had also been recorded in the seventeenth century about the Rev. Þorkell Guðbjartsson. "If anybody rode his horses, that he had laid his might on, secretly without permission, they would become stuck fast to the back of the horse, and the horse would run to the farm door of the priest's house, and the man would wait until the priest took his confession and let him loose (Einarsson 1955 p.3-4)...They called that old hard-fetters that they fastened men in their seat or on horse back with carved joined runes." (Ibid. p.17) Another account concerning the same wizard-priest records that, "Once it happened to him that he lost an old wether from his flock and he suspected that a thief had trifled with him. And one time as he was preaching in the church it happened that a sheep was heard bleating out of the mouth of a man who stood under the pulpit." The man then confessed the theft. (Ibid. p.16-17)

Jacqueline Simpson has observed that causing thieves to stick to stolen objects was also a common motif in English folklore, (Simpson 1975 p.105) and Keith Thomas has suggested that such legends may have served to so intimidate the guilty that they would be forced to incriminate themselves or restore the stolen goods. (Thomas 1971 p.212-222) As an example he mentions that an eye could be drawn on a wall which a thief would be unable to look at without their eyes watering. (Ibid. p.221) A similar spell was recorded in Iceland in the seventeenth century which would cause an ache in the thief's eye, (Einarsson 1955 p.17) and in the nineteenth century this spell was given the suggestive title of "*Þórshamar*" (Thor's-hammer).³² Several accounts of

³² Both of these sources comment that the thief could even lose an eye through this method, possibly another reference to the god Óðinn. In one variant from the nineteenth century the person performing the spell is told to say "*Rek ég í auga vígföðurs, rek ég í auga valföðurs, rek ég í auga ÁsaÞórs*." I stab in the eye of the father of battle, the father of the slain (two kennings for Óðinn) and Thor of

wizards identifying thieves were recorded in seventeenth century Iceland, but by the nineteenth century they had become much less common. Thomas has suggested that the clerical role in detecting thieves may have declined after the Reformation with the loss of confessions in the church. (Thomas 1971 p.154-155)

The status of the wizard in the nineteenth century seems ambiguous. While they were generally presented in a positive light there was some concern over the practice of magic itself. This may have been a result of changing attitudes in the seventeenth century. As Jón Eggertsson commented on magic in his day, "(it was) in olden times very common and (often) performed and was then thought to be entertaining, and their knowledge was praised, though it has now come about that such is held to be forbidden." (Einarsson 1955 p.18) The changed status of the wizard in the nineteenth century is best exemplified in accounts of the wizard's death. Several variants of this legend have been recorded, but they can all be fit into an identifiable type.

It's said that before the Rev. Eiríkur died he buried his magic books in Kálfsgil in Urðafell. They are north of Svörlubjörg. Before Eiríkur died he asked that his body be taken to church immediately after he died and lain in the coffin. He asked men to keep watch over his body the first night and light three candle on the coffin lid. They wouldn't last long, but he asked that the watch relight each one as soon as it went out so there would always be one lit, or else evil spirits would take him. But if a light lasted all the first night on his coffin then they would have no concern over him. That was done and a light was always lit until the day. Eiríkur had said that if his soul were safe then dew drops would fall out of a clear sky during his funeral, and it's said that that happened. (Árnason 1954 I p.565³³)

the *Æsir* (the Norse gods). (Árnason 1954 I p.431, recorded by Magnús Grímsson)

³³ Recorded by Magnús Grímsson

In the legend of the Rev. Hálfðan's death it is said that he was watched over by his fosterdaughter "whom he had raised from poverty and he loved her most of anyone." (Ibid. I p.505³⁴) This is repeated in a variant about the Rev. Sæmundur's death. "Sæmundur had fostered the daughter of a poor man. He was very fond of her and loved her so much that he wouldn't be separated from her." (Ibid. I p.485³⁵) When Kálfur Árnason was dying he told everyone to leave the farm, but his fosterson "whom he loved much" wouldn't leave, but hid himself to watch. (Ibid. I p.489³⁶) At the death of the Rev. Snorri of Húsafell he told his daughter to keep three candles lit. The first night she was barely able to keep one candle alight at any time, "but on the second night two burned more or less constantly, while on the third all three burned brightly throughout the night." (Benedikz 1964 p.31)

In another account about Sæmundur's death there was a downpour from a clear blue sky while his body was being carried. (Árnason 1954 I p.485-486³⁷) In a second variant of the Rev. Eiríkur's death he prophesied that "two birds would be seen, one white and the other black, over the church and they would fight. He bade that if the white bird won and managed to sit on the gable of the church then they should bury him in the churchyard, but if the black one had won and sat on the church then he ordered that they should bury him outside the yard." (Ibid. I p.565³⁸) It happened as he said and the white bird won. This account of the two birds is an

³⁴ Recorded by Páll Jónsson In Hvamm "from various old men in Skaga"

³⁵ "From Dr. Hallgrímur Scheving"

³⁶ Recorded by Þorsteinn Þórarinnsson from Ingibjörg Pálsdóttir

³⁷ Recorded by Þorsteinn Þórarinnsson

³⁸ Recorded by Brynjólfur of Minnanúp

international motif. It has been recorded in Sweden (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991 p.87-88) and in Scotland about Michael Scot. (Campbell, J.G. 1900 p.288)

In all of these variants the wizard is given a Christian burial and it is often explicitly stated that his soul has achieved salvation. The mere existence of these legends, however, suggests that their outcome was regarded as uncertain. In one case the wizard's instruction were not carried out. It was said that Arnþór of Sandur had learned his magic from an elf-woman. "Some spirit, probably his lover, had asked him to leave her his body, or to let her have it after he was dead, but Arnþór wouldn't allow that, but she had sworn that she would have him all the same. His body was said to have disappeared from his coffin before it was buried." (Ibid. I p.597-598³⁹) While the storytellers would not consign the wizards to eternal damnation apparently they were willing to leave them with the fairies.

In the seventeenth century the practice of demonology faded from the Icelandic wizard legends. This may have been a response to the witchcraft trials of that time. Demonology had played a prominent role in the legends of the early wizards, Sæmundur the Wise, Kálfur Arnason and the Rev. Hálfðan, but in the later legends concerning Hálfðan the Devil has been replaced by elves and ghosts, the more traditional figures of Icelandic folklore. The practice of demonology may be reflected in accounts of wizards raising *sendings* and books of magic, but these features have been fully assimilated into traditional Icelandic beliefs. The *sendings* are ghosts, not demons.

The earliest accounts of wizards learning their magic from ghosts or elves were recorded in the seventeenth century concerning Sæmundur's friend Jón and Halla of Straumfjörður.

³⁹ Recorded by Jón Borgfirðingur from Björn Johannesson

Historical accounts have been recorded of Jón the Learned raising storms and laying ghosts at this time. The Rev. Eiríkur is credited with having set up magic wards against pirate attacks, which could still be seen in the nineteenth century. These practices are consistent with the role of the medieval priest mediating between the community and hostile outside forces. Other legends have been recorded of wizards using their magic to punish improper behaviour and reinforce social norms. Similar legends have been recorded concerning the cunning parsons of England. These similarities may have been introduced to Iceland by Anglo-Saxon priests just after the conversion to Christianity.

The Scottish Wizards

In Scotland, despite similar origins, the wizard tradition developed very differently than it had in Iceland. Unlike their Icelandic counterparts the Scottish wizards were most often lairds, not priests. They seldom acted directly as mediators between the supernatural and the human world, nor did they serve to enforce the popular morality. The belief in demonic magic continued to play a large part in defining the role of the wizard, although this role may have been influenced by native beliefs as well. New legends appeared, especially in the Lowlands, but they never produced a body of legends comparable to that found in Iceland.

The migratory legend ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School" was especially popular in the Scottish Highlands. It has been recorded in several variants concerning all of the major Scottish wizards, but it does not always follow the same fixed structure. A variant following the international type outlined in Christiansen's index has been recorded in Sutherland about Donald-Duival MacKay. (Dempster, "Miss" 1888 p. 152) In another variant three scholars, Cameron of Lochail, MacDonald of Keppoch and MacKenzie of Brahan, were said to have studied at the Black School together.

When their education was finished the Devil was to get as his fee whoever was hindmost. The three young men made a plan to chase each other around and around in a circle so that none of them should be hindmost. At last the Devil was for clutching someone, but the young man pointed to his shadow which was behind. The Devil in his hurry caught at it, and the young man never had a shadow from that day. (Campbell J.G. 1900 p.286)

Other legends have been recorded depicting both Cameron and MacDonald as wizards, however Kenneth MacKenzie, or Coinneach Odhar, was more widely known as a prophet and he was not commonly associated with the Devil. In another variant of this legend from Gordonstoun it was said that the

wizard Sir Robert Gordon had sold his soul to the Devil.

In 1665, when seventeen years of age, Robert was sent to pursue his scientific studies at the University of Padua. Here he and boon companions, excited by the new scientific theories, but impatient in the belief that the almighty withheld the secrets of the universe, resolved to summon the Devil to their aid. In a darkened room they blasphemously incanted the Black Mass - and there was the Devil, ready to enlighten them for the price of a man's soul! Robert cannily bargained for twelve months' credit, demanding credit before payment, and the Devil agreed. So Robert became endowed with more knowledge than any man should have, a figure feared and shunned. A year later, as he walked down the street in Padua in full sunshine, a bearded, black garbed fellow suddenly confronted him - claiming his soul. "Take my shadow instead," retorted Robert. The Devil, delighted by this ready wit agreed. Robert should have twenty-five shadowless years. (Briggs 1971 Part B I p.132¹)

After that Gordon always walked in the shade to hide his lack of a shadow. This was also said of James Carnegie of Pittarro, the Earl of Southesk, who was known as an expert swordsman and a "gripping oppressor of the poor". (Chambers 1847 p.386) A similar account was told concerning Black John of Garafed.

He had made a compact with his satanic majesty to give himself up to his will in a year and a day, for this gift of supernatural power. When the time expired, Satan came to claim his subject. "There I am," said Black John, pointing to his shadow. Satan went off with it, and the form of Black John never after cast a shadow. (MacKenzie, W. 1930 p.68)

The idea that the shadow was taken in credit for the soul was mentioned in the nineteenth century by the Rev. James MacDonald. He commented that in his school days the most insulting taunt that could be flung at a boy was "Your

¹ This account is condensed from a much longer version in Brereton 1968 p.66-67

father had no shadow". (MacDonald, J. 1894 p.278) The motif of a wizard lacking his shadow was known in the Lowlands. It forms the basis for at least one legend told in Fife about Michael Scot without mentioning the Black School.

There goes a story of his having made some sarcastic remark on the conduct of some harum-scarum Fife laird whom he had met one day at a hunt, and who, in resentment of the affront, told Sir Michael that his personal appearance would be vastly improved were he to bring his shadow along with him when he went from home. No sooner had the laird given utterance to this ill timed sally, than he became sensible that his vision was growing dimmer, so that he directed his steps homewards; but before he had proceeded far he became stone blind, and was killed by falling over a crag. (Gardiner 1842 p.67)

In his appendix to The Lay of the Last Minstrel Sir Walter Scott referred to this motif as a popular belief.

The vulgar conceive, that when a class of students have made progress in their mystical studies, they are obliged to run through a subterraneous hall, where the Devil literally catches the hindmost in the race, unless he crosses the hall so speedily, that the arch-enemy can only apprehend his shadow. In the latter case the sage never after throws any shade; and those who have thus lost their shadow, always prove the best magicians. (Scott, W. 1820 p.156)

This account does not appear in the first edition of the poem. It was included in a later collection of Scott's poetical works. He does not mention the Black School, nor does he seem to associate the legend with Michael Scot. Alexander McBain claimed that "in the southern Highlands as in the Lowlands Michael Scot is most often the hero of the tale", (McBain 1888 p.239) but no variants of ML 3000 concerning him have been recorded. Another legend describing the origin of Michael Scot's magical skills was recorded in Strathclyde.

Ae day a merchant of Dumbarton sailed in his ship

from that town. After they had sailed several days, they got a great storm and were shipwrecked on the coast of a desert island. All the crew were drowned except himself. He, wandering about, found a cave on the shore and he took his abode in it. A mermaid found him there. She had a fondness to the stranger. And they afterward lived together in that cave. The mermaid every day went to her own element, or the sea, and brought provisions. And after a whole year's residence, and his mermaid spouse being from home, he saw a ship, and he hailed her. The ship's crew sent a boat ashore, and they entered into conversation with this forlorn merchant, who related the tale of his captivity, and his living in a cave with a mermaid; and how she brought rowth of food, and gowd, and sillar, and gows (or jewels), and wine, &c., to him, so much as he kentna what to do wi' them. They, being outward bound, requested him to gar the beloved mermaid gather all the stores she possibly could, and they hecht to come again after a year and a day, and tak him wi' the valuable spuillye, or boutie. They cam at the time appointed, and the mermaid being out they made quick dispatch to get all the stores on board before she cam, which done, they sailed away, and when she cam home she found the cave desolate and herried. She pursued and overtook the ship. She demanded her husband and stores. The skipper cast aff a bundle (to the mermaid) of hoops, and hecht her to get her husband after she counted them, which she did and requested her love, and the skipper gave her another bundle, again and again, till the reached Gourock and Lawrence bay.

The Dumbarton trafficker being on dry land refused to go with the mermaid again. But this mermaid told him that he must meet her at the cave where they spent so monie happie days, a year and a day hence, and she committed her bairn (or mongrel half fish and man) which she bore to the merchant, to its father, telling him to nurse it and give it much lair, as he had plenty of sillar belangan to her; and she gave him a book whilk he wasna to let the miraculous bairn see, till it was able to read it perqueir and squaurilie; and the bairn after the directions he sall find in that buke, after he sould be able to read it, could do what he liked, such as order the foul thief do once thing when he pleased. The mermaid's bairn took up his abode in the auld castle of Ardrossan. He went under the name of Michael Scot. (Michell and Dickie 1839 p.288-290²)

² Recorded by Andrew Crawford along with a variant of ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil". Crawford later commented "I gave (Mitchell) a rude draft and I expected him to colour

It is interesting to note that Michael Scot's knowledge is still acquired from a book and the magic which he will perform involves commanding the Devil. A possible variant of this legend has been told about Merlin. "The Scottish Merlin, is represented as the son of a river mermaid, by whom he was educated till he arrived at the age of three years, when he was delivered to his father by his mother with this declaration, "Gin ye school him as weel as I hae skeeled him, a' the deils o' hell winna cheat him." (Leyden 1829 p.197) In the legend of Merlin's birth in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britannia his mother was a mortal woman and his father a demon. In either case his half human status serves to illustrate his ambiguous nature. Another similar legend concerns the Welsh Physicians of Myddfai. In this account the mother left the mortal father, but she returned to teach her sons the arts of healing. (Owen 1887 p.22-24)

Another origin legend concerning Michael Scot was told in the Grampians. This has only been recorded in two variants, both of which are literary retellings.

Michael Scot the Wizard, as a young man, once came over the pass of Drumochter accompanied by two friends. As they were nearing the high peaks they were attacked by a huge "white worm". The creature seemed to have been some sort of dragon. Michael's friend ran, but Michael stood his ground and, after a hard fight, slew the beast. Then he rejoined his friends and they journeyed to an inn near what is now Dalwhinnie, where they spent the night. The three young men were rather full of their adventure and talked of it. The landlord of the inn then offered them a free reckoning if they would give him the centre portion of the "worm", which they had cut into three for easy carrying. Michael, as its owner, agreed. The innkeeper gave the portion to his wife and bade her take the largest pot and make a broth of it. This she did. Michael, curious to find out what dragon broth would be like, and entirely innocent of any other motive, rubbed his finger on the

them. But I was very sorry for he printed them in their rude form! Dreadful." (Cairn I p.21)

spoon used for stirring the concoction and sucked it. Instantly he knew all things, the language of the birds and beasts, how to raise and command the Devil, and much else, including the knowledge that as he had, however unintentionally, stolen the good of the dragon the innkeeper would kill him if he could. So Michael, now the greatest magician in all Scotland, left that place with his friends at some speed. (Swire 1963 p.47)

An earlier variant of this legend was recorded by William Grant Stewart, but it is too long to quote in full here. It has been suggested that Otta Flora Swire might have condensed her version from this earlier account, but the two differ in several respects. Michael Scot is identified as a mason, and the serpent is not referred to as a "worm". The landlady sends one of Michael's companions back to get the serpent. Most importantly the legend ends differently. The landlord does not intend to kill Michael Scot, rather "The astonished dupe of a landlady now found it in her interest to admit her sagacious lodger into a knowledge of the rest of her secrets." (Stewart 1823 p.50-56)

This legend has several international parallels. It resembles in some respects AT 673: "The White Serpent". In this tale-type a servant, told to cook a white snake, tastes a piece and learns the language of animals. Variants of this type are found in Grimm's Fairy Tales (#17) "The White Snake", and in Bulgaria (Wratislaw 1889 p.199). In a variant of this legend from Austria a servant of Dr. Theophrastus tasted a piece of a *haselwurm* or white snake and learned the language of plants, which called out to him concerning their medicinal properties. (Scott, R.D. 1930 p.176-184) Another variant recorded in Brittany is closer to the Michael Scot legend. In this variant a workman lodging with an old woman brought her a snake which he had killed. She cooked the snake. While she was out the workman ate a piece, and discovered that he could understand the language of birds. (Scott, R.D. 1930 p.178)

The closest parallel to the Michael Scot legend is found in the Faroese legend of Marjun Lavarsdóttir. It is said that when she was in Finland she visited an old woman who was cooking a *vitormur* (a snake or worm of knowledge). While the old woman was out the broth started to bubble over. "Marjun took the lid off and touched some of the broth. She burnt her finger and put it in her mouth. At the same time the woman came in the door and shouted "Shame upon you! You took that which I had intended for my son". In that way Marjun got the magic craft". (Jakobsen 1900 p.43) Another Faroese variant of this legend has also been recorded concerning Jákup the Wise. (West 1980 p.36) This could also be described as a variant of the migratory legend ML 3030: "The White Serpent's Flesh". In variants of this legend someone cooks a white serpent, and some other person tastes the broth with the effect that they gain some supernatural skill, usually either medical knowledge or second sight. In practice it is difficult to distinguish between variants of this legend and AT 673. Christiansen has given a detailed summary of ML 3030, but he admits that variants do not always followed a fixed form. "In some versions there is only a reference concerning the white serpent." (Christiansen 1958 p.39)

The belief that eating a serpents flesh can give supernatural knowledge can be traced back to ancient Greece. Philostratus claimed that Arabs and Indians had learned the language of animals by eating the heart of a dragon. The migratory legend occurs in several variants from the twelfth century. Saxo Grammaticus recorded a legend in Denmark in which the hero Erik learned the language of animals by eating food which his step-mother, the witch Kraka, had prepared with the venom of a black serpent. Kraka had intended the food for her son, Roller just as the witch in the legend of Marjun Lavarsdóttir had intended the *vitormur* for her son. (Saxo Grammaticus 1979 p.124)

Another early Norse variant occurs in the legend of Sigurður. In this account Sigurður had killed the dragon Fáfnir and was roasting his heart when he touched his finger to it and put it in his mouth. In this way he learned the language of birds, and heard some nut-hatches discussing how the dwarf Regin was planning to kill him. (Jónsson 1954 p.298) A similar account was also recorded in a twelfth century Irish legend concerning Finn Mac Cumail. (Scott, R.D. 1930 p.48) In this account Finn acquired the gift of prophecy by touching his thumb to a cooking salmon and placing it in his mouth. The tradition of Finn's thumb of knowledge goes back at least to texts from the ninth century. In nineteenth century variants of this legend Finn became aware, through this gift of prophesy, of a plot against his life, (Scott, R.D. 1930 p.76-77) as happened in the Michael Scot legend. This motif is also found in an eighteenth century Welsh legend of Taliesin. (Ibid. p.119)³

Another, more contemporary, variant of this legend was told in Sutherlandshire about Fearachar Leigh, or Farquhar the Leech. In this legend a doctor offered to pay Farquhar if he could get a white serpent from under a hazel tree.

So Farquhar went back to the hazel glen, and when he had cut some boughs off the tree he looked about for the hole that the doctor had spoken of. And what should come out but six serpents, brown and barred like adders. These he let go, and clapped the bottle to the hole's mouth, to see would any more come out. By and by a white snake came rolling through. Farquhar had him in the bottle in a minute, tied him down and hurried back to England with him.

The doctor gave him sillar enough to buy the Reay country, but asked him to stay and help him with the white snake. They lit a fire with the hazel sticks, and put the snake into the pot to boil. The doctor bid Farquhar watch it, and not let anyone touch it, and not let the steam escape, "for fear," he said, "folk might

³ For further reference see Hilda Davidson, "The Seer's Thumb" from Davidson (ed.) 1989

know what they were at".

He wrapped up paper round the pot lid, but he had not made all straight when the water began to boil, and the steam began to come out at one place.

Well Farquar saw this, and thought he would push the paper down round the thing; so he put his finger to the bit, and then his finger into his mouth, for it was wet with the bree.

Lo! He knew everything, and the eyes of his mind were opened. "I will keep it quiet though," said he to himself.

Presently the doctor came back, and took the pot from the fire. He lifted off the lid, and dipping his finger into the steam drops he sucked it; but the virtue had gone out and it was no more than water to him.

"Who has done this!" he cried, and saw in Farquar's face that it was he. "Since you have taken the bree of it, take the flesh too," he said in a rage, and threw the pot at him. Now Farquar had become allwise, and he set up as a doctor. (Dempster, "Miss" 1888 p.229-230⁴)

This was probably the "Ferchard Leche", the king's physician, who received a grant of land in Sutherland from Robert II. (Leech was the medieval term for doctors and those who engaged in blood letting.) Variants of this legend have also been recorded about the Islay doctor, (Ibid. p.381-2) and Sir James Ramsay of Banff (Chambers 1847 p.226) who was reputed to be a physician. There may have been some association between this legend and the account of Michael Scot learning magic. The thirteenth century Michael Scot, the astrologer, was also known to have practised medicine, (Thorndike 1965 p.72-78) and the earliest reference to him recorded in Scotland by Boethius identified Scot as a skilled physician.

The association between magic and medicine may have been a result of the practice of folk healers. Many well known books of magic were likely medical books. Medical manuscripts in Gaelic were fairly common. At the time of the Reformation they outnumbered those in English and Scots in

⁴ Told by J. MacLeod of Laxford

Lowland monasteries. They were often bound small enough to be carried when visiting the sick, and usually including an astrological calendar in the back. (Hamilton 1981 p.35-36)

There was at one time a man of the name MacI____ living in the heart of Sutherlandshire, who was a great worker of some kinds of witchcraft. He had a book in his possession - it was called the Black Book, and they said it was by it he did his work. When he was dying he gave it to a friend in Rossshire, and this man became a famed man in the art of curing cases where beasts or bodies were supposed to have been injured by witchcraft. I was on intimate terms with this man, and on one occasion I requested a sight of the book, but was refused it just then. But he said, "I will leave it for you, and you will have it after my death, for I know you will not make bad use of it." After his death I made one or two attempts to get it from the family, but failed; and was at last informed that a son of the deceased had sold it to Dr.____. When I got an opportunity I applied to the Doctor and told him that it had been left by the old man for me, but he said that he could hardly now return it, having given it to the museum of G____. (MacLagan mss. XXXVI #8030⁵)

From this brief description this would seem to be a simple medical book, but in other references the Black Book is more explicitly linked with demonology. Ernest Marwick mentions two copies of the Black Book in the Orkneys from the nineteenth century.

The Book of the Black Art, a manual of magic, was known by reputation throughout Orkney. The few who had seen it declared that it was printed in white characters on black paper. It not only contained all kinds of spells and charms, but it conferred on its owner the power to put them into effective operation. There was one grave drawback to owning it. If any one died with it in his possession, he and the book were immediately claimed by the book's author, the Devil.

In at least one case a book of magic was said to have

⁵ Recorded by Kenneth MacKay of Bonar Bridge in Sutherlandshire.

been obtained directly from the Devil. This is the legend of the Red Book of Appin.

The First, who got the book, rode an entire horse (an animal that no evil could touch) to a meeting of witches. The Devil wrote in a red book the names of the assembled company. The man, instead of letting the Devil write his name, asked to be allowed to do so himself. On getting the book for that purpose he made off with it. (Campbell J.G. 1900 p.293)

In another variant of this legend iron horse shoes protected the horse and its rider from the power of the Devil while in a third variant the man drew a protective circle around himself with the point of a sword. (Campbell J.F. 1890 II p.99-101) Both of these variants rely on a belief in the protective power of iron against supernatural beings. It is important to note that while the book was obtained from the Devil in this legend it was won through trickery and protective countermagic was employed.

Legends concerning the Black Book or the Red Book of Appin have not been associated with any of the wizards, although Michael Scot was known to have a Book of Might, (Brown J.W. 1897 p.203) and Donald Duival MacKay had a book of magic which appeared in ML 3020: "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book". The wizard legends have not been told concerning any locally famous healers, such as Dr. Ure, (Monteith 1887 p.53) or Gregor Willox. (Hall 1807 p.438)

The most common type of wizard legend were those which purported to explain the origin of some especially prominent landmark. These were most often told about Michael Scot, but at least one instance referred to the character of Merlin. John Leyden wrote that "to both these personages indifferently, tradition attributes the formation of the Catrail, a trench and rampart of great antiquity, apparently intended to divide the inhabitants of the East coast from those of the West. It is supposed to have been formed by the

agency of daemons, and it is sometimes said to have divided England and Scotland, and, sometimes, to have passed between Craik and Berwick bridge." (Leyden 1829 p.197) Merlin was also credited with having erected Stonehenge (Tolstoy 1985 p.3) and, according to Sir Walter Scott, "In the south of Scotland any work of great labour and antiquity, is ascribed either to the agency of *Auld Michael*, Sir William Wallace, or the Devil." (Scott, W. 1805 p.245)

I know of no other such references concerning Wallace, but William Nimmo claimed that in Stirlingshire "The military causeway, and other Roman works, are sometimes ascribed to the same people (the Picts), at other times to Michael Scot of Balwearie, who is supposed to have performed many extraordinary exploits by his skill in magic." (Nimmo 1777 p.71) David Ure echoed this comment writing of the Roman road, "In many places in England it is called *Mitchell Scott's Causeway*, and it is believed by the credulous vulgar there, that the Devil and his friend Mitchell made it in one night." (Ure 1793 p.133) Michael Scot is also said to have ordered the Devil to lay a road through the Cunninghamhead moss in Strathclyde. (Mitchell and Dickie 1839 p.290) At another time he brought the Flanders moss, in the carse of Stirling, across from the continent on bearers. "The moss is twenty-three miles long, and lies north of Stirling, where unfortunately the bearers broke. (Campbell J.G. 1900 p.285) The legend does not record where the moss was meant to go. In these legends the wizards seem to fail in their efforts almost as often as they succeed. Another account from Strathclyde had Michael Scot attempt to build a bridge.

The warlock ae day, set the Deil to erect a brig frae the island of Cumbra to the mainland at Hunterston Point. When this stupendous work was almost finished, a luckless stranger or landlower, unkennand wha was the waar or the mason, expressed his surprise at the greatness of this magnificent undertaking, thus "*Gude be*

heir and Rowntree⁶." Immediately Satan vanished in a flash of fire whilk consumed his prodigious brig, that fell into the sea, leaving the landstules or foundations of the said brig, one of them on Cumbra and the other near Kilbride. The Cumbra landstule is called the Deil's dyke to this day. (Mitchell and Dickie p.290-291)

Rowan tree, or mountain-ash, was a popular defense against witchcraft. A similar legend is told about a dry road which Scot ordered his demons to lay between Fortrose and Ardersier (or Campbelltown) "seeing the great damage the commercial class of the community would sustain from the operation, he ordered them to demolish the most part of the work." He then ordered the demons to make ropes which would reach to the moon out of sea sand. (Stewart 1823 p.84-85) He is also said to have agreed to build a bridge across the Ness at Inverness.

He then made one condition; all the burghers and their wives must remain indoors from dark until dawn for three nights. This was agreed. On the first morning, when the curious burghers looked out, there in the river were the piers of a bridge. On the second morning the bridge was half finished. On the third morning the bridge was complete in every detail." (Swire 1963 p.11)

In some cases these short accounts could be combined to form longer legends as in one example from the Borders.

Michael is said to have commanded the devil to divide the Eildon Hills in twain. Whereupon he seized a spade, spat on his hands, swore a mighty oath, and just to show Michael what he really could do he divided them in three, throwing the spoil over his shoulder and thereby creating the Black Hill behind the Cowden Knowes.

This he completed in a single night. But the magician's instructions being very precise, and finding that the Eastern hill was lower than the others, he reprimanded the devil who immediately added another spadeful of earth to the lower one, and made the distinct prominence on the skyline of the hill, which

⁶ Good be here, and rowan tree

can be seen to this day.

Being displeased with the disobedience of his order to cut the Eildons in two and not three, Michael ordered him forthwith to dam the waters of the Tweed. To this order the devil demurred whereupon Michael made towards him to punish him. Pursued by Michael Scot the devil ran for it and reached the river at Gattonside where he embarked on a shovel, and steering with his tail he skidded down the Tweed, closely pursued by Michael in a boat. As he swept through the lower waters at Rutherford, a raven flew out of the rocks and reminded Michael that he only had power over the devil when on dry land. Michael immediately disembarked and so stopped the devil and ordered him to commence work. This he did, making the dyke across the bed of the stream at Mackerstoun. To this day, the dyke can be seen, and the Corbie pool, where the raven flew from the rocks can be pointed out at Rutherford.

Still angry with the insubordination of his familiar's, Michael bade him go and spin ropes of sand at the rivers mouth. This the devil did and successfully, but it has proved so difficult that he is still at it. His work can be remarked as every tide, cast up, or receding, uncovers the ever shifting sand at Berwick Bar. (Cunningham 1974 p.18-19⁷)

This resembles a variant of the migratory legend ML 3020: "Inexperienced use of the Black Book" which has been recorded in Fife in which Michael's servant commanded the demons to cleave the Windygates Hill in two before sending them to twist ropes of sand. (Gardiner 1842 p.71) This legend may be the source of the "roadway through a hill" which William Blair claimed was traditionally said to be the work of Michael Scot "or his emissaries." (Blair 1857 p.118) He was also said to have cleaved the earth leading up from Kirckaldy. "He had offended a fiend, and was pursued by him. To stop the pursuit, or get an advance of his enemy, the wizard caused the earth to yawn at that spot, and its yawning mouth has never since been closed." (Taylor, J.W. 1875 II p.62) A hoof print on top of Bell's Crag in Fife is

⁷ Told by George Summers, huntsman to the Duke of Buccleuch.

attributed to Michael Scot's horse, (Gardiner 1842 p.69) as is another near Cromarty in Easter Ross. (Swire 1963 p.119)

Michael Scot and the Devil could also appear separately. In one account from the Pentlands "Auld Michael" was said to have piled up the Kippit Hill in a single night.

Another local tradition is that Old Nick, standing on the side of the hill, riddled the sand and rocks which were thrown into his "sieve" from the sandy knoll on Ingraston Hill opposite, and threw the rocks into Biggar moss, seven miles away. While the sand that fell through the sieve formed the Kippit Hill, or, as it is termed locally, "the Deil's Riddlins." (Grant 1927 p.51)

Similar legends were told on the Welsh Border about Jack o' Kent, or Jacky Kent, and the Devil throwing stones or spadefuls of earth, "and the stones he flung or dropped could never be shifted again." Jack was also said to have commanded the Devil to build the Grosmont Bridge. (Simpson 1976 p.21)

In general the benefits of Michael Scot's actions are presented as incidental to the course of the action. He is primarily concerned with simply keeping the Devil occupied. An exception to this was recorded in a legend from England.

This river (Wansbeck) discharges itself into the sea at a place called Cambois, about nine miles to the eastward, and the tide floods within five miles of Morpeth. Tradition reports that Michael Scot, whose fame as a wizard is not confined to Scotland, would have brought the tide to the town, had not the courage of the person failed, upon whom the execution of this project demanded. This agent of Michael, after his principal had performed certain spells, was to run from the neighbourhood of Cambois to Morpeth without looking behind him, and the tide would follow him. After having advanced a certain distance, he became alarmed by the roaring of the waters behind him, and, forgetting the injunction, gave a glance over his shoulder to see if danger was imminent, when the advancing tide immediately stopped, and the burgess of Morpeth thus lost the chance of having the Wansbeck navigable between their town and the sea. It is also said that Michael intended to confer a similar favour on the inhabitants of Durham, by

making the Wear navigable to their city; but his good intentions, which were carried into effect in the same manner, were also frustrated through the cowardice of the person who had to "guide the tide". (Chatto 1835 p.47-48)

The motif of a spell being broken if the agent looks back over his shoulder is familiar from the Greek legend of Orpheus. It also occurs in a legend from Scotland.

There was a gentleman in Morayshire, at one time, who had learned witchcraft in the school of black art in Italy. On one occasion he ordered his coachman to drive, in his carriage and four horses, across Loch Spynie, on the ice of one nights frost. Loch Spynie was very deep at that time. The wizard charged a pair of pistols in the coachman's presence, telling him that he would be shot if he looked back when on the ice.

On they went, on the thin ice, and as soon as the leaders had their fore-feet on dry land the coachman looked back and saw, "twa black craws" on the front of the coach. The ice immediately gave way and down went the carriage and wheelers; but the leaders, being very powerful animals, dragged them all to land.

The powder in the pistols got wet, and would not burn, which saved the coachman's life.

The crows were two familiar imps or devils. (Dempster, "Miss" 1888 p.187⁸)

Another variant of this legend identifies the gentleman in question as Sir Robert Gordon. (Brereton 1968 p.68-69) Another account of a wizard guiding the tide, without this motif, was recorded in the south of England. "Drake constructed the channel from Dartmouth to Plymouth. Tradition says that he went with his demon to Dartmoor, walked to Plymouth, and the waters followed him." (Hunt 1881 p.231)

In his index of migratory legends Christiansen designates such etiological legends as ML 5020, but he admits that they do not conform to any consistent outline. "There is no definite epic pattern, and the principal element is the

⁸ Told by J. Rose from Skibo.

motif rather than the story." (Christiansen 1958 p.88) In Norway such legends usually involve giants and trolls. In Orkney and Shetland trows were said to build bridges. "They quarrelled and threw boulders at each other: they set huge isolated rocks in the sea close to shore so that they could sit on them and fish." (Marwick 1975 p.31-32) In the Highlands landmarks were often described as rocks dropped by *cailleachan*, or hags. (Bauman 1964 p.34-36). In England etiological legends are often told about the Devil. (Simpson 1973 p.61-62 and Briggs 1971 part B I p.81-92)

In many ways these characters resemble the role of the trickster figure from native American mythology. The trickster was an ambiguous figure, a cunning fool who acknowledged neither moral nor social rules of good and evil. He was portrayed as living at an earlier time, reshaping the world around him, often accidentally, for the benefit of humans. (Radin 1956 p.195-211) Like the mythical trickster figure Michael Scot was said to have lived in the distant past. This may explain why the wizard tradition did not continue to produce new wizards in the Lowlands, as it did in Iceland. The magic which was performed in the legends was not regarded as an ongoing tradition.

Etiological legends have also been recorded in Sutherlandshire concerning Donald Duival MacKay. He has been especially associated with the cave of Smoo. "Donald went one day to meet his master at the cave of Smoo. They had a violent quarrel, and Donald fled: the print of his horses hoofs can be seen to this day." (Dempster, "Miss" 1888 p.152)

It is said that Domhnall Duagan and Satan once fought a terrible battle at the cave of Smoo. The reciter describes this cave as an extraordinary formation. It is at the bottom of a bold rocky front looking out over the minch to the north west. The scenery all around is extremely wild. The rock is composed of limestone with streaks of red chalk...But about the fight between Domhnall Duagan and sathan (sic). Among the evidence of the conflict, said to be

still tracable, are a deep print in the rock, supposed to resemble the print of a horse's hoof. This is ascribed to Satan; another footprint, resembling such mark as the bare foot of a man might leave on the surface of consolidated snow. This is ascribed to Domhnall Duagan. And the red streaks and spots on the stone are supposed to have been caused by the blood that was spilled in the fight.

It is said that MacKay gained the day, having at last thrown the enemy over the face of the rock; and that in his fall Satan lost his tail, and was so thoroughly drubbed, that for three days after he disturbed no body. (MacLagan Mss. XXXIII 7372-7373⁹)

In another account the Devil learned that on a certain day Donald was planning to explore the Smoo cave. The cave had three caverns. Donald got as far as the second when his dog, which had raced ahead, returned "howling and hairless". Then a cock crew and the Devil, and three witches he had with him, escaped, blowing holes in the roof of the cave. This is given as the origin of the holes through which the Smoo burn enters the cavern. (Swire 1963 p.183) These legends differ from those told about Michael Scot in that Donald does not command the Devil. In another account, however, it is said that once while Donald ate his lunch the Devil "walked up and down playing the bagpipes to him." (Swire 1963 p.182) This is in contrast to a reference from England calling Mitchell Scot "the Devil's piper". (Denham 1895 p.116) Donald was also said to be able to command the fairies.

Donald could oblige the fairies or "little men" to work for him. One day, when short of straw for his cattle, he begged some of a neighbour, who good naturedly replied that, provided he thrashed it himself, he might take as much straw as he liked. Donald went to the barn, flung himself down, and went to sleep. The hinds made a good joke of this saying, "Donald-Duival's thrashing will be a light one." On their return from dinner they heard a great thumping and beating, and saw straw flying out the windows in quantities. Donald's voice was heard repeating "You and me, me and you."

⁹ Told by Mr. MacKay of Bonarbridge, Sutherlandshire

Fairy flails were hard at work, and all the straw was soon thrashed out. (Dempster, "Miss" 1888 p.152)

The earliest reference to this motif occurs in John Major's exposition on St. Matthew written in 1518. He mentioned "Fauni or Brodne", who "thrash as much grain in one night as twenty men could do". (Lang 1893 p.30) A similar legend was also told of Jack o' Kent on the Welsh Border. It is said that he played the fiddle all day while his flail threshed a barnful of corn by itself. Jack o' Kent has been identified as either Dr. John Kent of Caerleon, a fifteenth century astrologer, or a Franciscan friar John Gwent, who died in 1348. (Ibid. p.57) In another legend told about Jack he was hired by a farmer to scare crows while the farmer went to the fair, but Jack didn't want to miss the fair, "so he called all the crows together from all the fields around, and when they were all collected, he sent them into an old barn with no roof to it. But Jack put the crows in there and said something to them, and they couldn't get out, try as they might." (Simpson 1976 p.58-59) This legend has also been told about a wizard called Davies (Ibid. p.60) and in Yorkshire of the Hermit of Lindholme. (Peacock 1883 p.379)

In addition to Michael Scot and Donald Duival MacKay there were a number of other wizards in Scotland. Two wizards from the Lowlands, both from the thirteenth century, were William Lord Soulis and Hugh de Gifford, the Lord of Yester.

According to the family legend Hugh de Gifford had one daughter, who was wooed by one of the Brouns of Coalston. And when matters had proceeded between the young people to a highly satisfactory conclusion, Broun visited the magician to obtain his consent to the marriage and to discover what dowry the latter proposed to give his girl. The suitor found the old man wandering in his orchard. And in reply he plucked a pear from a tree and handed it to him with the words - "This is my daughter's dower. So long as it is preserved, your lands, which will go to her descendants,

will remain intact."

Near the end of the eighteenth century a bride of one of the Brouns tried to take a bite from the desicated pear to see what would happen. Shortly thereafter the family was forced to sell a portion of their land. Another version of the legend asserts that the gift was made on the way to church for the wedding, and that Hugh halted the bridal procession beneath a pear-tree from which he plucked the talisman. (Beard 1933 p.147¹⁰)

Some accounts comment that the teeth marks could still be seen in the pear, however in a manuscript account of the Browns of Coalston Crawford gave a different version of the event.

They had a pear in their family, which they esteemed yer palladium; it's reported, that Betty MacKenzie, when she married George Brown of Coalstoun, dreamed she had eat the pear, which her father-in-law looked on as a bad omen, and expressed great fears that she should be an instrument in the destruction of the house of Coalstoun. (Sharpe 1884 p.24-25)

Lord Yester was said to have formed, by magic art, in his castle of Yester, a large cavern with a vaulted roof, called Bo-hall, or Hobgoblin hall. (Sharpe 1884 p.24) Lord Soulis was also said to have invoked demons to fortify his castle of Hermitage, forcing his vassals to drag materials, like beasts of burden.

Tradition proceeds to relate, that the Scottish King, irritated by reiterated complaints, peevishly exclaimed to the petitioners, "Boil him, if you please, but let me hear no more of him." Satisfied with this answer, they proceeded with the utmost haste to execute the commission; which they accomplished by boiling him alive on the Nine-stane Rig, in a cauldron said to have been long preserved at skelf-hill, a hamlet betwixt Hawick and the Hermitage. Messengers, it is said, were immediately despatched by the King, to prevent the effects of such a hasty declaration; but they only arrived in time to witness the conclusion of the

¹⁰ Condensed from Simpson 1908 p.181

ceremony. The Castle of Hermitage, unable to support the load of iniquity which had been long accumulating within its walls, is supposed to have partly sunk beneath the ground; and its ruins are still regarded by the peasants with particular aversion and horror. (Leyden 1833 p.241-242)

In fact William Lord Soulis was not executed. He had been caught in a conspiracy against Robert the Bruce in 1320, his lands had been forfeited and he was confined in the castle of Dumberton, where he died. (Ibid. p.240) A similar story has been told about the Sheriff of Mearns.

This person, whose name was Melville of Glenbervie, bore his faculties so harshly, that he became detested by the barons of the country. Reiterated complaints of his conduct having been made to King James I (or, as others say, to the Duke of Albany). The monarch answered, in a moment of unguarded impatience, "Sorrow gin the sheriff were sodden and suppit in broo!" The complainers retired, perfectly satisfied. Shortly after, the Lairds of Arbornothe, Mather, Laureston, and Pittaraw, decoyed Melville to the top of the hill of Gavrock, upon Lawrence Kirk, under pretence of a good hunting party. Upon this place (still called the *sheriffs pot*,) the barons had prepared a fire and a boiling cauldron, into which they plunged the unlucky sheriff. After he was sodden (as the king termed it) for a sufficient time, the savages, that they might literally observe the royal mandate, concluded the scene of abomination by actually partaking of the hell-broth. (Scott, W. 1833 p. 265-266)

The motif of a death sentence accidentally spoken also occurs in the legend of the death of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury when King Henry II of England reportedly asked, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?"

The rest of the Scottish wizards lived around the seventeenth century. Most were lairds, only one prominent clergyman in Scotland gained a reputation as a wizard. In the seventeenth century "Archbishop Sharpe was accused of entertaining "the muckle black Deil" in his study at

midnight, and of being "levitated" and dancing in the air." (Lang 1893 p.23) Sharpe, formerly a presbyterian, had been made Archbishop of St. Andrew's by Charles II after the Restoration. He was murdered by Covenanters in 1679 who first shot him in his carriage at such close range that his clothes caught fire, then killed him with their swords. It was said that their guns could not kill him since he had made a pact with the Devil that protected him from lead bullets. "They no longer doubted this, when they found in his pocket a small clew of silk, rolled round a bit of parchment, marked with two long words in Hebrew or Chaldaic script." (Scott, W. 1833 II p.214-215)

The same had been said of Captain Clelland of Faskin who was killed by his kinsman Sir John Cochran at the battle of Muidykes in Lochwinnoch parish in 1685. "The people in the neighbourhood of that battle are still believers that Capt. Clelland had power the *proofshot* fra the Deil, and Sir John shot him by a sillar button taen fra his breik knee." (Mitchell and Dickie 1839 p.279-280) General Dalziel and John Graham of Claverhouse, the Viscount of Dundee, were also said to be proof against shot. Each of these men had fought for the exiled King James II+VII against the Covenanting party. Graham of Claverhouse, in particular was known to the Covenanters as "Bloody Clavers."

The Whigs, whom he persecuted, daunted by his ferocity and courage, conceived him to be impassive to their bullets, and that he had sold himself, for temporal greatness, to the seducer of mankind. It is still believed that a cup of wine, presented to him by his butler, changed into clotted blood; and that when he plunged his feet into cold water, their touch caused it to boil. The steed, which bore him, was supposed to be the gift of satan, and precipices are shown, where a fox could hardly keep his feet, down which the infernal charger conveyed him. (Scott, W. 1833 II p.211)

In 1689 two of the most famous wizards in the Highlands, Coll MacDonald of Keppoch and Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel,

fought alongside the Viscount Dundee. (Terry 1905 p.288) He was also associated with the Baronet Robert Grierson of Lagg, whom John Leyden identified as a wizard. (Leyden 1833 p.138) Grierson of Lagg was known for his cruelty in persecuting the Covenanters. He was said to hang his prisoners alive from an iron hook. (Ibid. p.41) It is likely that all of these men first gained their reputations as wizards among the Covenanters. In Highland legends, however, MacDonald of Keppoch and Cameron of Lochail were transformed into more ambiguous, even heroic, figures.

Before the battle Dundee enquired from him which side would be victorious and he replied "The Army which first sheds blood." The two armies were already drawn up facing each other and Lochail's words ran like wildfire through the troops till they reached young Grant of Glenmoriston who called an accomplished Glenmoriston deer-stalker to him, repeated the prophecy and at the same time pointed out an officer mounted on a white horse in front of the enemy lines as being "most conspicuous". The stalker took aim and ensured victory for Dundee. (Swire 1963 p.232)

Not all of the Highland wizards could have gained their reputations in this way. Both of the Migratory legends ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School" and ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil" have been told about George Buchanan who lived in the sixteenth century.¹¹ Buchanan was a scholar and tutor to King James VI. He may have gained his reputation as a wizard partly from his support of the Reformation, and his outspoken opposition to Queen Mary and the Franciscan monks. In the Lowlands he had a different reputation, best known through the anonymous chap book The Witty and Entertaining exploits of George Buchanan Commonly Called the King's Fool. Donald-Duival Mackay lived in the first half of the

¹¹ Several variant of these legends are preserved on tape in the archives of the School of Scottish Studies, all recorded in South Uist. I know of no other variants of these legends, or any other wizard legends, concerning Buchanan.

seventeenth century, before the civil wars, and Robert Gordon had opposed Graham of Claverhouse's forces. Gordon may have gained his reputation for magic from his education at the university of Padua, which was rumoured to be a site of the Black School. On his return to Scotland he redesigned the irrigation on his estate and invented a ship's pump which was bought for King James's navy. He was also said to keep a salamander in a furnace in his basement.

Well, at that time, if any of the lairds in the north-east wanted a job done in wrought iron that required particular skillful craftsmanship, he gave his order to Sir Robert of Gordonstoun because it was well known that the finest examples of the blacksmith's art came from the Gordonstoun vaults. But it was also well known that Sir Robert employed no smith. Rumour had it that the laird had the Devil a prisoner in there and made him work for his keep. (Brereton 1968 p.75)

Alan Bruford has suggested that the highland wizard tradition may have been influenced by the statutes of Iona in 1609 which required all Highland lairds to send their sons to the Lowlands to learn to read and write in English.¹² This "foreign" education would have taken place at the same time as the witchcraft trials when Lowland learning could have been easily associated with demonology.

There were two men at one time in Edinburgh. They had both been at the Black School, and had learned the Black art. One time one of them went (to the) urinal which could be seen from their window, and the other made up his mind that he would play a trick on him. So he went and putting his head out at the window, he applied his art, and kept the other fellow where he was for ever so long, until he could not understand what was wrong with him, and did not know what he should do. At last he happened to look up, and there was his partner with his head out through the window space, looking down on him. He knew now the cause of his having been kept in such a predicament, and at once, he paid the other one back by putting a pair of deer's horns on him, and

¹² From comments made in private conversation.

now, the one was just as bad as the other. And so the one with the horns was glad to relieve his companion on condition that his companion would remove the horns from him, which was done. (MacLagan mss. XXXV 7957¹³)

This legend has also been told about MacDonald of Keppoch and MacDonald of Glengarry. (Maclean mss. VII 1.1.7) Each of the variants are said to take place in Edinburgh, although the legend itself has not been recorded in the Lowlands. The motif of putting a pair of horns on a man's head also occurs in a similar context in a legend from the Faust book. (Palmer and More 1966 p.196-197) Another legend told about Faust has also been recorded concerning MacDonald of Keppoch.

A drover once bought a flock of goats from MacDonald of Keppoch, who himself accompanied the goats to Lochellside. Here, in crossing a ford, the goats were taken away by the stream, and went past the drover as stalks of fern, all except one dun hornless goat. The drover returned in search of MacDonald and found him lying on the heather, seemingly asleep. He pulled his hand to awaken him, but the hand came away with him. In the end, however, the hand was put right, and the goats were restored to the astonished drover. (Campbell J.G. 1900 p.287)

In the variant of this legend told about Faust he did not put things right in the end. (Palmer and More 19 p.201) These legends may have been derived from the Faust book which had been translated into English in the beginning of the seventeenth century, and disseminated through the oral tradition to the Gaelic speaking Highlands. Similar legends have been recorded in the Highlands and Lowlands about anonymous Black Lairds. In another variant of this legend the magic is said to have been an illusion. "A veil of darkness had been cast about the other's eyes by Keppoch's witchcraft." (MacKay 1914 p.91) Despite the more sinister

¹³ Recorded by Archibald MacLean in Oban

image of the wizard the magic in these legends is not often explicitly linked with the Devil.

A girl from Applecross says that she heard her father telling about a lad who had learned the Black Art. He was staying with his mother, and one day said to her, "Would you wonder much if I would take the heads off the hens, and put them on again?" His mother said that she did not think he could do that. But he commenced and took every head off, and was putting them on again. When his mother saw it, she ran for the minister, and asked him to come and try if he could do anything to put her son from doing these things. When the minister came the son was in bed, and pretended to be sleeping, but with his black art he set his mother and the minister a dancing through the house, and then, getting up, he went out and asked the neighbours to come and see them dancing. They came, and when the minister was allowed to come to his senses, he was glad to go home, saying as little as possible. (MacLagan mss. XXXV 7968¹⁴)

Several variants of this legend have been recorded and it has also been told about Iain Dubh, Black John, MacLeod, (Maclean mss. II 1.1.2) who was said to be able to cast illusions. The motif of a spell causing people to dance occurs in another legend as well. It has been recorded in the Highlands about MacDonald of Keppoch.

He was out one day. He came to the house of a tenant farmer, and he asked the wife of the tenant to give him a drink, but she said that she didn't have a bit of milk, and she had to keep what she had for the reapers. "Give me a drink of water, then," said he. "There's no water in the house," said she, "I am so busy making dinner for the reapers, I don't have time to get water for you." As he left then, he put a spell on her. She began to dance, and when the husband sent the men to the house they all began to dance. Finally the husband went over himself to the house. They were all dancing inside. He went over to the window as he didn't want to go inside. The wife then called out the whole story to him, how she didn't have a drink for the gentleman. He quickly got his horse and rode after the man. He told

¹⁴ Told by Bessie MacRae, Applecross

him what had happened and asked "What has come over the house?" The gentleman told him not to go in the house, "but you should take a little piece of wood from over the door, and as soon as you have it, you should burn it." (Murray mss. 187¹⁵)

In a variant of this legend the housewife and the reapers were made to chant "I've seen the son of the son of Ronald (ie. MacDonald)/ and a drink he refused me, a drink he refused me." (MacKay 1914 p.92-95) Another variant in Gaelic concerning an anonymous Black Laird has the rhyme "The big grizzled man who came from the west/ asked for food and got not a bit." (MacDonald, W. 1974 p.256-261¹⁶) In the Lowlands this legend has been told about Michael Scot. (Gardiner 1842 p.68-69) A variant occurs in Sir Walter Scott's appendix to The Lay of the Last Minstrel.

Upon another occasion, the magician, having studied so long in the mountains that he became faint for want of food, sent his servant to procure some from the nearest farm-house. The attendant received a churlish denial from the farmer. Michael commanded him to return to this rustic nabab, and lay before him his cap, or bonnet, repeating these words,

Master Michael Scott's man
sought meat, and gat nane.

When this was done and said, the enchanted bonnet became suddenly inflated, and began to run round the house with great speed, pursued by the farmer, his wife, his servants, and the reapers, who were on the neighbouring *har'st rigg*. No one had the power to resist the fascination, or refrain from joining in pursuit of the bonnet, until they were totally exhausted with their ludicrous exercise. (Scott, W. 1805 p.250)

James Hogg referred to this account in brief when he commented that "Sir Walter Scott has preserved it, but so altered from the original way that it is not easy to

¹⁵ Told by Catherine Cameron, Rannoch

¹⁶ Recorded by Calum Maclean from William MacDonald

recognize it" (Hogg 1813 p.340) He then recorded another variant which begins with a lengthy prologue.

There was one of Mr. Michael's tenants who had a wife that was the most notable witch of the age. So extraordinary were her powers, that the country people began to put them in competition with those of the master, and say, that in some *cantrips* she surpassed him. Michael could ill brook such insinuations; for there is always jealousy between great characters, and went over one day with his dogs on pretence of hunting, but in reality with an intent of exercising some of his infernal power in the chastisement of Lucky. He found her alone in the field weeding lint; and desired her, in friendly manner, to show him some of her powerful art. She was very angry with him, and denied that she had any supernatural skill. He, however, continued to press her, she told him sharply to let her alone, else she would make him repent the day he troubled her. How she perceived the virtues of Michael's wand is not known, but in a moment she snatched it from his hand, and gave him three lashes with it. The knight was momentarily changed to a hare, when the malicious and inveterate hag cried out, laughing, "Shu, Michael, rin or dee!" and baited all his own dogs upon him. He was extremely hard hunted, and was obliged to swim the river, and take shelter in the sewer of his own castle from the fury of his pursuers, where he got leisure to change himself again to a man.

The rest of the legend follows much the same outline as the variants from the Highlands and Fife. Michael Scot is said to have sent his servant, Fauldshope, to borrow some bread from the witch. When she refused him he placed a note above the door which caused the witch, and eventually all the reapers, to dance around the fire singing, "Master Michael Scott's man / cam seekin bread an' gat nane." Finally the husband arrived and looked in through the window.

The good man mounted his horse, and rode with all speed to the master, to inquire what he had done to his people to put them all mad. Michael bade him take down the note from the lintel and burn it, which he did, and all the people returned to their senses. Poor Lucky died overnight, and Michael remained unmatched and alone in all the arts of enchantment and necromancy. (Ibid.

In a later edition of Scott's collected poems he gave another account of this legend which was much closer to Hogg's variant, commenting that, "this tale was told with less particularity in former editions, and I have been censored for inaccuracy in doing so". (Scott, W. 1820 p.186) He identified the witch in the story as the Witch of Falsehope.¹⁷

The motif of people being magically caused to dance is found in two migratory legends ML 3070: "The Demon Dancer" and ML 7010: "Revenge for Being Teased", in which a Nisse, a Norwegian house-spirit, danced to death the girl who had teased him. As with the Nisse the wizard in this legend is avenging a lack of hospitality.

The first part of this legend is surprisingly similar to an account recorded in Italy by C.G. Leland from an old woman called Maddalena about a wizard named Mengot Scotto. In this legend Mengot used his magic to reveal a woman's infidelity to her husband, a Prince.

Then said the Princess, between rage and shame,
"Hast thou scotched me this time; but next time I will
scotch thee."¹⁸ She straightway sought a witch, said to
be more powerful than Mengot himself, and telling what
had happened, promised her gold by handfuls if she would
revenge her on the wizard. The woman told her to be
easy, for she would arrange the matter. She paid Mengot
a visit as if to take his advice, and, stealing his
magic rod, struck the ground three times, whereupon
Mengot was turned into a hare, and fled from his
habitation. Having foreseen, however, by his art that
such danger might arise, Mengot had prepared a pool of

¹⁷ According to Herbert Maxwell Fauldeshope is the name of a glen ("the glen of the sheep folds") by the river Tweed. There is a hill in this glen called "Witchie hill" (Maxwell 1905 p.40)

¹⁸ "M'hai scottato me, ma ora scotto te." This play on words is the turning point of the tale.

enchanted water at his door. Into this he now leaped, and by its virtue was able to resume his proper form. The first thing he did was to seek the magic rod, and, finding it still in his house, he struck the witch on the head. She became a skinless cat, and in that form haunted the guilty Princess for her sins; while Mengot was ever after distinguished by the name of Scot. (Brown J.W. 1897 p.224-225)

This legend portrays Scot as a Faustian character, as in the fourteenth century Italian sources, using his magic to entertain nobles and aiding them in love affairs. The motif of a magician transformed into a hare is a familiar one in Scotland. It may be related to another Scottish legend which has been recorded in Fife.

Sir Michael occasionally intermitted his severer studies to enjoy the pleasures of the chase. When hares were scarce or did not sit close, he had recourse to an old woman who inhabited a cottage on his property, and who, in consideration of the protection extended towards her, condescended to become puss in such emergencies, and give the dogs a turn or two for the amusement of their master. In these diversions, of course, the old lady always eluded their pursuit. It happened, however, one day that a strange hound belonging to one of the party was in the hunting-field; but, as he was held in leash, Sir Michael did not hesitate to start lucky as usual. Just as the hare was beginning to gain on her pursuers, someone cut the leash which held the strange dog. Off started the hound fresh from the springs, and soon overtook poor puss. By this time, however, she was close to a hut on the moor, which she was observed to enter, by leaping through the bole, or small open window, in the gable. But she did not effect her escape until she had been slightly wounded by the strange dog; and it was remarked by her neighbours that lucky had a limp ever after, which incapacitated her for enacting the part of puss for the amusement of the wizard and his guests. (Gardiner 1842 p.67)

The motif of an old woman or witch transforming herself into a hare is very common. According to Dr. Alan Bruford, "this is probably the most persistent and widespread legend about witches in the British Isles," (Bruford 1967 p.16) Although details may often vary the central motifs are still

recognizable in the introduction to the Falsehope legend. From this evidence it seems most likely that the legend originated in Scotland and spread to Italy, but we can not be certain without a full study of Italian folklore.

Another legend concerning Michael Scot has been told in the Highlands. Like many of the Lowland legends this account involves the Devil, but in an antagonistic role. This legend has been recorded in several variants.

Once long ago there was a man who sold himself to the Devil. The Devil got such a hold on him that he could not get out of his power. It suited him well enough when he was young; he could get anything he wanted. But when he grew old he began to regret it, but he didn't know how he would get rid of the hold the Devil had over him.

Now some one advised him to go and make his way to Hell, and when he reached there not to spare using God's name in plenty until he secured from the Devil the contract he held over him.

The man went off and reached Hell. When he reached the door, he called out, "God bless us!"

"Out of here, you monster, away from the door" said the one inside.

"O, for the love of God," said the man, "let me in."

"Away, away from the door and keep that name away from here," said the Devil.

"By the Book," said the man, "I shall keep it resounding in your ears for ever until you give me back the contract that you hold over me."

"Oh," said the one inside, "it is not I who have it but my mother."

"Go away, then, and get it from her."

The Devil went off to his mother and asked her to give to him the contract they held over such and such a man. She wouldn't give it to him, indeed she would not.

The Devil then said to her that he would put her in a lime and brimstone furnace. But that was no use. She would not part with the contract.

Then he said to her that he would put her in the bed of Braighean Barr. But she would not part with the contract.

Then he said to her that if she would not give up the contract he would put her into the same bed with Michael Scot.

"Oh, anything but that!" said she, and handed over the contract. The Devil gave it to the man outside and

that man went off free from the power the Devil had held over him. (MacDonald, D. 1977 p.31¹⁹)

In the earliest recorded variant of this legend Scot had himself sent the man to Hell, but this is an elaborate literary adaptation. (Stewart 1823 p.58-59) In a number of variants on his return the man tells him about the bed that is awaiting him in Hell, descriptions of which vary in the different accounts, and Scot repents.

On his death-bed he told his friends to place his body on a hillock. Three ravens and three doves would be seen flying towards it; if the doves were first it was to receive a Christian burial. The ravens were foremost, but in their hurry flew beyond their mark. So the Devil, who had long been preparing a bed for Michael, was disappointed. (Campbell J.G. 1900 p.288)

The motif of the raven and dove fighting over the wizard's soul is similar to an account told about Jack o' Kent on the Welsh Border (Simpson 1976 p.60) and the Rev. Eiríkur in Iceland²⁰, and a variant of this motif was also told in a legend about Coinneach Odhar's death. (MacKenzie, A. 1917 p.79) The entire legend has also been told in Scotland about the "King of Eilifacs", (MacDonald, D.A. 1972 p.1-22) and Peter Scholar. (SA 1968/261/A4²¹) This legend is a variant of the international tale-type AT 756B: The Devil's Contract. In his index of tale-types Stith Thompson listed a final episode to this legend concerning a hermit's response. This also occurs in one variant of the legend.

There was a holy man worshipping God in a rocky cave for twenty years, and a bird used to come to him

¹⁹ Recorded by Donald J. MacDonald from Duncan MacDonald of South Uist.

²⁰ See p.79

²¹ Recorded by John MacInnes from Alick Williamson, Edderton, Easter Ross.

with food from heaven. One day the bird was late in coming, and the holy man asked what had kept it late.

"No small thing," said the bird, "is that which has kept me late today. We had a feast today in Heaven and great joy with the arrival there of the soul of Michael Scot."

"Michael Scot!" said the holy man. "The most accursed man who ever lived - Whereas I have been here worshipping God for twenty years!"

The holy man went off in a blaze of fire to the skies.

He got Michael Scot's place in Hell and Michael Scot got his place in heaven. (MacInnes 1963 p.111²²)

Another legend of Michael Scot's death comes from the Lowlands. It was recorded by Sir Walter Scot in his appendix to The Lay of the Last Minstrel.

Michael, like his predecessor Merlin, fell at last victim to female art. His wife, or concubine, elicited out of him the secret, that his art could ward off any danger except the poisonous qualities of a broth, made of the flesh of a *breme* sow. Such a mess she accordingly administered to the wizard, who died in the consequence of eating it, surviving, however, long enough to put to death his treacherous confidant. (Scott, W. 1805 p.250)

In Leyden's glossary to his edition of The Complaynt of Scotland he comments that "The rankest poison in the world is the flesh of a *brode* sow, *a-breming*", or a brood sow in heat. This account is very similar to a legend from the north of England.

The Northumbrian statement is more circumstantial, and gives a reverse turn to the event. Mitchell having told his wife that nothing was more poisonous than the boiled flesh of a breeming sow, she faithlessly took advantage of the confidence reposed in her by preparing for him a dish of the deleterious article, of which he heartily partook. Growing deadly sick, he suspected her infidelity, and ascertaining what she had done, he made

²² Recorded by Donald MacDonald from Duncan MacInnes in Eriskay

inquiry of what had become of the "broo", or water in which it was cooked, for this was the only remedy to counteract the poison. The wife had thrown it out, but being shown the place where this had been done, he drank out of the hollow made by a cow's foot sufficient to allay the banefull effects. He punished his wicked spouse by causing two eggs to be roasted and put fire hot below her arm-pits, her arms being tied down, She was thus, in a most cruel manner, "burnt to death, the heat reaching her heart." (Denham 1895 p.118)

In legend concerning the death of another wizard called Black Donald is closer in structure to the legends of the wizard's death told in Iceland.

When Black Donald was dying on Canna, he was in terrible distress. People were going in to see him. There was a widow's son there, a brave, strong fellow. A whistle was heard outside the house, and the man who was in his death-throes on the bed got up to go out. Everyone who was there cleared out but the widow's son, who caught hold of Black Donald and put him back on the bed. There was some one standing on the knoll opposite the house, and he was so tall that they could see the island of Rum between his legs. This person went away, and they saw him walking on the surface of the sea over to Rum. This has been the worst piece of sea ever since, the sea between Rum and Canna. (MacLellan 1961 p.87²³)

The tall man is often identified as the Devil, and the man who saves Black Donald is sometimes said to be the son of a widow that Donald had hanged for stealing. In another legend Sir Robert Gordon fared less well. He was said to have sold his soul to the Devil.

But as the years rolled on and the day of reckoning drew nearer, Robert bent his mind to a plan of escape. The barns and stables of Gordonstoun, burnt to the ground a century before, had not been replaced. Aided by his extensive study of necromancy, he now planned a new stables in a circle of magic proportions which, by his calculations, would provide for his soul a secure sanctuary the Devil himself would be powerless to

²³ "Learned from Alasdair MacIntyre, Beinn Mhór"

violate.

Upon the fateful evening Robert invited his friend, the parson of Duffus, to keep him company...At last the hour of midnight struck. A great gust of wind swept into the room, a cloven hoof appeared beneath the bellying hanging, and a voice cried: "Robert, your time has come!" But Robert's retort was ready. Had he not set the clock forward an hour? The Devil conceded the point; promising to return in one hour. Then the parson, quivering with terror, besought Robert to seek sanctuary at one of the holiest places in all the neighbourhood, the ancient kirk of Birnie near Elgin. And at last he managed to shake Robert's belief in the security of his own round square sanctuary.

The rest of the story was told by the parson of Birnie, the Rev. John M'Kean, to his wife. Towards midnight he was returning home when he was overtaken by Robert, who breathlessly asked him the way to Birnie, then dashed onwards through the night. The sound of Robert's steps had barely faded when M'Kean was overtaken by a horseman, who enquired of him if a man had passed that way. Some emanation of evil froze the truth upon M'Kean's lips. He replied that he had seen no one. The horseman rode on. Silence closed down. Suddenly the night was torn by one long piercing shriek. While M'Kean was yet rooted to the spot by terror the horseman came from the darkness again, and M'Kean saw that across his saddle lay a limp human body; and upon either side ran a great hound, and the one nearer to him had its fangs buried in the neck of the corpse. (Briggs 1971 Part B I p.133²⁴)

This last account is a variant of the migratory legend ML 3060: "The Fairy Hunter", from Germany, Denmark and the south of Sweden and Norway. In Scotland the hunter is identified as the Devil, and the legend is most commonly told of the Witch of Laggan. (Stewart 1823 p.136)

In Scotland the wizard legends can be divided into a Highland and a Lowland tradition. In both traditions the wizard's lack of a shadow is a common motif. If a person's shadow can be associated with their soul then this may take on a more sinister meaning, but more likely it simply

²⁴ Condensed from Brereton 1968 p.70-74

reflected the wizard's supernormality. Magic was also associated with medical knowledge in both traditions. This may reflect the widespread practice of folk healing, and it was supported by the common use of medical books. As in Iceland this shows how motifs associated with demonology were assimilated into popular traditions.

In the Lowlands Michael Scot dominates the material. Different legends have been recorded describing how he first gained his knowledge, but all of these associate his practice of magic with the Devil. The most common type of legends told about Michael Scot are etiological, concerning the formation of certain prominent geographical features. Similar legends were told in the North and the West of England. These are related to legends of *cailleachan* and *trows* from the Highlands and Islands, and they present Scot as a semi-mythical being from a distant past. In these accounts his ability to command the Devil, or demons, is assumed. The fairies are only explicitly linked with one wizard, Donald Duival MacKay, who represents the northernmost part of a tradition extending to the North-East of England, and including Michael Scot in Scotland and Northumbria and Jacky Kent from the fourteenth or fifteenth century on the Welsh border.

The Lowland wizards Michael Scot, Lord Soulis and Lord Yester are all from the thirteenth century. The majority of the Highland wizards lived around the seventeenth century. John Leyden wrote of these later wizards: "The charge of magic was transferred from the ancient sorcerers to the objects of popular resentment of every age" who "have been indiscriminately stigmatized as necromancers and warlocks." (Scott, W. 1833 IV p.235-236²⁵) In fact it seems likely that they first gained their reputations for magic in much the same manner as the earlier wizards. They were first accused

²⁵ From the introduction by John Leyden to "Lord Soulis"

of having sold their souls to the Devil by political enemies. These accusations were supported by their reputations for foreign learning, and various legends were attached to their names.

The Black Laird tradition which influenced their legends may have been influenced by the legends told about Faust and accounts of the witchcraft trials. These legends resemble the accounts recorded in Italy concerning Michael Scot, and they could be classed with the Southern European wizard tradition. There are few direct references to the Devil in these legends, but they present a more sinister image of the wizard. This is especially evident in legends of the wizard's death. Michael Scot was allowed to repent his use of magic when he learned the fate awaiting him, but Sir Robert Gordon had sold his soul to the Devil and he was carried off to Hell.

The Witchcraft Trials

The word "witch" may be misleading in relation to the sixteenth and seventeenth century witchcraft trials. Depending on the context in which it is used "witchcraft" can conjure up anything from a pre-Christian fertility cult to the, evil, inhuman ogres of the Grimm brothers' tales. The first step in any study of the witch tradition should therefore be to separate, as much as possible, the various beliefs involved. The Gaelic word *buidseach* is derived from the English *witch*. For the purpose of this study these can be regarded as a single tradition, with regional variations. In Iceland little distinction was made in the folklore between male and female magicians. However, in the saga literature there was a separate term for magic *seiðr* which was performed predominantly by women. The practice of *seiðr* persists in some of the legends concerning the more prominent female magicians. In the context of the witchcraft trials the word most often used in the literature of the time was *malefica* (or *maleficus* if the witch were male) derived from a Latin root meaning "to do ill".

In his study of the European Witch Trials Richard Kieckhefer divided the early development of the continental witchcraft persecutions into four main stages. In the first stage, at the beginning of fourteenth century, the trials generally concerned prominent, well educated men. The accusations were often based on political motives, and they involved the same elaborate ritual demonology reflected in the wizard legends. In the second stage politically motivated trials became uncommon. Those accused were obscure or politically unimportant and the rate of prosecution was lower, but the charges remain essentially the same. Throughout the course of this century, however, there was a gradual shift. In the third stage a greater number of women were accused, and the number of trials and executions

increased dramatically. At the same time there was a change in the nature of the accusations as well. While the men had been accused of summoning and commanding the Devil the women were charged with worshipping the Devil and serving him. The final stage involved full scale witch hunts with fully developed accounts of Devil worship and a high rate of prosecution throughout the period. (Kieckhefer 1976 ch.2)

Those accused of witchcraft in these early trials were initially charged primarily with having used their magic to cause harm to their neighbours or to their livestock. (Ibid. p.64) Once in court, however, new charges were often imposed on the initial accusations. Under torture the accused witches were forced to confess to having flown, or ridden on animals, to the witches' sabbath where they would copulate with demons and feast on the flesh of murdered children. More importantly they were said to have made a formal pact with the Devil and agreed to renounce their Christian baptism. This meant that the witches could be tried as heretics.

These accounts were not entirely new. In his history of the witches' sabbath Norman Cohn has shown that accusations of infant cannibalism and incestuous orgies were first raised against Christian communities in second century Rome. (Cohn 1975 p.1-4) After the third century as Christians were assimilated into Roman society they began, in turn, to raise similar accusations against groups of rural Christian extremists. These accounts continued to arise throughout the middle ages with occasional variations and additions directed against different groups of heretics until by the twelfth century the Devil was said to appear and preside over these gatherings in person. (Ibid. p.21)

Certain features which arose during the course of these confessions had not appeared in accounts of demonology or in the earlier trials of heretics, and they can not be explained as the product of learned beliefs. These include accounts of

witches flying at night through the air to the sabbath on animals. Cohn relates these accounts to the popular belief in *strigæ*, or women who magically transform themselves into birds. The best description of a *striga* occurs as a question in an eleventh century penitential.

Do you believe that in the silence of the quiet night, when you have settled down in bed, and your husband lies in your bosom, you are able, while still in your body, to go out through the closed doors and travel through the spaces of the world, together with others who are similarly deceived; and that without visible weapons, you kill people who have been baptized and redeemed with Christ's blood, and together cook and devour their flesh; and that where the heart was you put straw or wood or something of the sort; and that after eating these people you bring them alive again and grant them a brief spell of life? (Ibid. p.209)

According to Cohn the belief in *strigæ* was readily assimilated into the stereotype of the witch since both were accused of cannibalism. *Strigæ* may be related to the *cailleachan*, or hags, of early Irish legends, who could perform magic and transform themselves into birds. (Ross 1973 p.139-164) Another parallel to the *strigæ* was described in Laxdæla Saga (XLVIII) by the character Án. "A woman came to me, very ill-favoured, and pulled me from the bench. She had a short sword in one hand and a trough in the other. She put the sword to my breast and cut open my belly and took the intestines out and put straw in their place. Then she went out." However this account was described as a dream. It was regarded as an ill omen, but not as an actual description of events.

The belief in witchcraft may also have been influenced by accounts of the procession of the dead, and of women who were said to follow Diana. These processions were first described around the turn of the tenth century in the Canon Episcopi.

Wicked women believe and openly avow that in the hours of the night they ride on certain animals, together with Diana, the goddess of the pagans, with a numberless multitude of women, and in the silence of the dead of night cross many great lands; and obey (Diana's) orders as though she were their mistress, and on particular nights are summoned to her service. (Ibid. p.211)

Similar beliefs were recorded by several sources throughout the middle ages in Italy, France and Germany referring to Diana, Herodias or Holda (Frau Holl). (Cohn 1975 p.210-219) In the alpine region this procession was associated with Perchta, who was also known to open the stomachs of evil-doer's and fill them with straw. (Motz 1984 p.154) Early Germanic law had rejected the belief in *strigæ*, and the Canon Episcopi denounced accounts of Diana's procession as illusions or errors, but in the end of the fourteenth century two women in Milan were both tried and executed for following a "Signora Oriente". They claimed that the Signora had instructed them in divination and healing and that once a week they would join her to feast and travel at night with the spirits of the dead. (Henningesen 1990 p.204) These cases arose as part of the witchcraft trials, but well before the first recorded accounts of the witches' sabbath.

The issue of popular witchcraft beliefs in Scotland has been unfortunately confused by the works of Margaret Murray. According to Murray the belief in witchcraft was based on an actual pre-Christian fertility cult which had survived throughout Western-Europe at least into the eighteenth century. Murray was herself an Egyptologist and she demonstrated little knowledge of European history, historical method or folk-lore studies. Her sources are drawn primarily from witchcraft confessions and contemporary English or Scottish accounts of the trials, but she carefully omitted

any unrealistic or supernatural features. Her description of this cult followed closely the model proposed and developed by Sir James Frazer in The Golden Bough, and she has been criticized for making the same errors as the inquisitors at the witchcraft trials who, in her own words "misunderstood the evidence and then exaggerated some of the facts to suit their preconceived ideas." (Murray 1921 p.10)¹

There does not appear to have been any widespread concern over witchcraft in Scotland until the middle of the sixteenth century, and it was not officially condemned by law until 1563. There were about a dozen cases recorded in that year. One of the first to be accused of witchcraft under the new law was "Agnes Mullikine, alias Bessie Dunlop" of Dunfermline. She was convicted and banished from the parish. This was both the first and the mildest sentence to be recorded. (Pitcairn 1833 I part 1 p.432) She was not so fortunate a second time, if she were the same "Elizabeth or Bessie Dunlop" who was described as spouse to Andro Jak of Ayrshire in 1576. On this occasion she confessed that she had been in contact with the spirit of Thom Reid, who had died in battle at the field of Pinkie in 1547. When asked if she could practice healing she confessed that "Sche herself had na kynd of art nor science swa to do, quhen sundrie persounes cam to hir to seik help for thair beist, thair kow or yow, or for ane barne that was taen away with ane evill blast of wind, or elf-grippit, scho gait and sperit at Thom, and Thom wad pull ane herb and gif hir out of his awin hand."² (Ibid. part 2 p.53)

¹ See Cohn 1975 p.99-125 for a detailed critique of Murray's use of her sources.

² She herself had no kind of art nor science so to do ... when sundry persons came to her to seek help for their beast, their cow or ewe, or for a bairn that was taken away with an evil blast of wind, or elf-gripped, she went and asked Thom, and Thom would pull an herb and give (it to) her

When Bessie had asked Thom why he helped her he told her that "quhen sche was lyand in chyld-bed-laure, with ane of her laiddis, that ane stout woman cam in to hir, and sit down on the forme besyde hir, and askit ane drink at hir, and sche gaif hir ... Thom said, that was the Quene of Elfhome his maistress, quha had commandit him to wait vpon hir, and to do hir gude."³ (Ibid. p.55) For doing good Bessie Dunlop was convicted and burned. A similar account was recorded in 1588 when "Alesoun Peirson" in Byrehill confessed that she had spent seven years with the good neighbours and the Queen of Elfhome, "and that scho had freindis in that court quhilk wes of hir awin blude, guha had gude acquaintance of the Quene of Elphane."⁴ In particular she mentioned her cousin William Sympsoune, "ane grit scoller and doctor of medicin." (Ibid. p.162) According to James Melville "Alison Pearson" had "confessit hir to haiff learnit medicin of ane callit Mr. Wilyeam Simsone, that apeired divers tymes to hir eftir his dead, and gaiff hir a buik."⁵ (Lang 1893 p.23) A third case came up in 1597. "Cristiane Lewingstoun" in Leith claimed that "hir dochter wes tane awy with the Farie-folk." She confessed to practicing healing, but claimed "that all the knowlege scho had was be hir dochter, wha met with the

out of his own hand.

³ When she was lying in child-bed, with one of her ladys, that a stout woman came in to her, and sat down on the form beside her, and asked a drink of her, and she gave (it to) her ... Thom said, that was the Queen of Elfhome his mistress, who had commanded him to wait upon her, and to do her good.

⁴ And that she had friends in that court which was of her own blood, who had good acquaintance with the Queen of Elfhome.

⁵ Confessed herself to have learned medicine of one called Mr. William Simpson, that appeared divers times to her after his death, and gave her a book.

fairie."⁶ (Pitcairn 1833 II p.26)

The mention which Bessie Dunlop made of having met with the Queen of Elfhome while lying in child-bed is a reversal of the common migratory legend ML 5070: "Midwife to the Fairies". In variants of this legend a woman is called upon to help deliver a fairy child. Often she is rewarded for her help, sometimes with special skills in healing, or as a midwife. In many variants she is later blinded in one eye when the fairies learn that she has also gained the ability to see them. This was described by Stith Thompson in his Motif Index of Folk-Narrative⁷ "Mortal midwife or nurse gets some of the fairy ointment in her eye as she anoints the eyes of the child. She is able to see the fairies as they are. Later, woman sees fairies, often at fair. She speaks to one. He asks which eye she sees him with and blinds that eye." In 1691 Robert Kirk referred to this motif in relation to a woman "in the countrey next to my last residence" who had been abducted by the fairies from her child-bed. "She perceived little what they did in that spacious house she lodg'd in, untill she anointed one of her eyes with a certain unction that was by her; which they perceiving to have acquainted her with their actions, they fain'd her blind of that eye with a puff of their breath." (Kirk 1691 p.86)

Bessie, Alison and Cristian each claimed to receive their cures not directly from the Queen of the fairies, but from the spirits of the dead. Many researchers have commented on the relationship between fairies and dead spirits. Kirk mentioned that certain people, "being illiterate and unwary in their observations", believed the fairies to be "departed souls", but he disagreed with this

⁶ her daughter was taken away with the Fairie-folk ... that all the knowledge she had was by her daughter, who met with the fairie.

⁷ Motif F235.4.1(a)

interpretation. Around the turn of the twentieth century W.Y. Evans-Wentz interviewed a number of old people in the Highlands who claimed that the fairies were "spirits" (unfortunately he did not record the original Gaelic word used.) They claimed that the fairies were like the dead, but that they were fallen angels. (Evans-Wentz 1911 p.93-116) This belief features in a popular legend. One of the informants quoted this legend as it was told by the Rev. Donald MacDonald.

He said that they were those who left heaven after the fallen angels; and that those going out after the fallen angels had gone out were so numerous and kept going so long that St. Michael notified Christ that the throne was fast emptying, and when Christ saw the state of affairs he ordered the doors of Heaven to be closed at once, saying as he gave the order, "Who is out is out and who is in is in." (Ibid. p.105)

This legend was first referred to by King James VI. "At the fall of *Lucifer*, some Spirites fell in the aire, some in the fire, some in the water, some in the land: In which Elementes they still remain." (King James 1597 p.20) These spirits became the fairies.

In 1597 King James VI wrote his Daemonologie outlining the contemporary belief in demonic witchcraft. He was primarily interested in demonstrating "that such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practized and that the instruments thereof, merits most severely to be punished", (Ibid. p.xi) and the work is largely a compilation of continental beliefs supporting the witchcraft trials. However James also described some local beliefs, especially concerning the fairies "which by the gentiles was called Diana and her wandering court." James related "that sundrie witches have gone to death with that confession that they have been transported with the Phairie to such a hill, which opening, they went in and there saw a faire Queene, who being now lighter, gave them a stone that had sundrie vertues." James

did not relate these accounts to the witches' sabbath, rather he claimed that "the deuill illuded the senses of sundry simple creatures in making them beleue that they saw and harde such things as were nothing so indeed." (James VI 1597 p.73-74)

The phrase "being now lighter" may be a reference to childbirth in which case this is a variant of the migratory legend ML 5070: "Midwife to the Fairies". The stones of "sundrie vertues" which King James mentioned also have their parallels in Scottish folk beliefs. The most famous is the stone given to Coinneach Odhar by the fairies which he used to prophesy. (MacKenzie, A. 1917 p.5-8) Another account claimed that Coinneach's mother got the stone from the ghost of a Norwegian Princess in an account similar to the legend of Magnús Pétursson in Iceland. (Ibid. p.4-5) In the legend of his death Coinneach was said to have thrown the stone into a cow's muddy footprint which then swelled into a lake. (Ibid. p.78) This may be related to an account of a woman from Strathnaver who had a white stone with which she could do "many wonderful things".

One of the Gordons of Strathnaver having a thing to do wished to have both her white stone, and the power of it. When he saw that she would not lend it or give it up he determined to seize her, and to drown her in a little loch. The man and the woman struggled there for a long time, til he took up a huge stone with which to kill her. She plunged into the lake, throwing her magic stone before her, and crying, "May it do good to all created things save to a Gordon of Strathnaver." He stoned her to death in the water, she saying, "Manaar! manaar!" ("Shame! shame!") And the loch is called the loch of shame to this day. (Dempster, "Miss" 1888 p.221)

In 1643 John Brugh of Fossway near Dollar was charged with using "ane enchanted stane as of the bigness of a dow" to cure a patient, (Hamilton 1981 p.83) but otherwise such stones were not prominent in the witch trials. There was no mention in this account of any contact with the fairies.

Early in the nineteenth century Gregor Willox was said to have a stone and a piece of a kelpie's bridle which he used to heal and to detect thieves. The stone was said to have been "concealed for untold ages in the heart of a brick, and was cut from its place of concealment by a fairy." (Gregor 1881 p.38) However according to James Hall, who wrote of Mr. Willox as a contemporary, Willox himself had claimed that the stone "came from Italy, being handed down from his grandfather." (Hall 1807 p.438)

In 1597 the fairies were mentioned again in the charges read against Andro Man during his trial in Aberdeen. "Thow confessis and affermis thy selff, that be the space of thriescoir yeris sensyne or thairby, the Devill, thy maister, com to thy motheris hous, in the liknes and scheap of a woman, quhom thow callis the Quene of Elphen, and was delyverit of a barne, as apperit to the their, at quhilk tyme thow being bot a young boy, bringand in watter, that devilische spreit, the Quene of Elphen, promesit to the that thow suld knaw all thingis, and suld help and cuir all sort of seikness, except stand deid."⁸ (Spalding Club 1841 I p.119) The fairies were further described in the final deposition against him. "Thow affermis that the elphis hes schaps and claythis lyk men, and that they will have fair coverit taiblis, and that they ar bot shddowis, bot are starker nor men, and that they have playing and dansing quhen they pleas; and als that the quhene is verray plesand, and wilbe auld and young quhan scho pleissis; scho makis any king

⁸ Thou confess and affirm thy self, that by the space of three score (60) years ago, or thereby, the Devil, thy master, came to thy mother's house, in the likeness and shape of a woman, whom thou calls the Queen of Elfame, and was delivered of a bairn, as appeared to thee there, at which time thou being but a young boy, bringing in water, that devilish spirit, the Queen of Elfame, promised to thee that thou should know all things, and should help and cure all sort of sickness, except stone dead.

quhom scho pleisis, and lyis with any scho lykis."⁹ (Ibid. p.121)

These accounts of individuals visiting the fairies have parallels elsewhere in Europe. Gustav Henningsen has found a number of cases in Sicily from the sixteenth and seventeenth century in the archives of the Spanish inquisition concerning *donas de fuera*, or the "ladies from outside." These women, occasionally men, claimed that they would leave their bodies in a trance and travel in spirit to regular gatherings presided over by the Queen of the fairies (variously called La Matrona, La Maestra, etc.). There they would feast and dance and be instructed in the use of medicinal herbs and beneficent magic. (Henningsen 1990 p.198-204) Henningsen compares these accounts with contemporary beliefs documented elsewhere in the Mediterranean and the North of Africa. (Ibid. p.207-215) Carlo Ginzburg has found several accounts of female "benandante" in the North of Italy who claimed to be able to speak with the dead, but they did not practise healing. (Ginzburg 1983 p.33-39) Ginzburg's study is primarily concerned with the more prevalent belief in male "benandanti" who claimed to travel in spirit to fight the Devil for the good of the harvest. A similar account was recorded in Livonia when an old man claimed to be part of a company of benevolent werewolves, "the hounds of God" who would travel in spirit to fight the Devil for the fruits of the earth. (Ibid. p.29-31)

Each of these accounts describe some form of shamanism in which the individual's spirit is sent out while the body remains behind in a trance. This practice is not described

⁹ Thou affirms that the elves have shapes and clothes like men, and that they will have fair covered tables, and that they are but shadows, but are stronger (sturdier?) than men, and that they have playing and dancing when they please; and also that the queen is very pleasing, and will be old and young when she pleases; she makes any(one) king whom she pleases, and lies with any she likes.

explicitly in any of the Scottish witchcraft trials, but it may have been referred to by Alison Pearson when she said that, "scho wad be in hir bed hail and feir, and wald nocht wit quhair scho wald be on the morne." (Pitcairn 1833 I part 2 p.162) In some variants of ML 5070: "Midwife to the Fairies" the woman is said to visit the fairies at night, or even in her sleep. Robert Kirk was himself said to have been taken by the fairies when he collapsed on a fairy mound and appeared to have died. (Lang 1893 p.21) However, this is not consistent with the descriptions in legends from the nineteenth century, and Evans-Wentz's informants insisted that when the fairies took people "they took them body and soul together." (Evans-Wentz 1911 p.102)

Henningsen has suggested that accounts of the witches' sabbath represent an inversion, or "diabolization" of the fairy cult. Like the *donas* the witches were said to gather at regular meetings where they were instructed in the use of magic. In the sabbath, however, the fairies have been replaced by demons and the feasting and dancing has been turned into cannibalism and orgies. (Henningsen 1990 p.191-207) This theory can also be applied to the Scottish witchcraft trials. Unlike the *donas* the Scottish witches were not said to gather at regular meetings. Often they claimed to have been abducted by the fairies, and the visits occurred only once. This is reflected in the witchcraft trials. Despite the importance of the witches' sabbath in continental beliefs, accounts of the sabbath are relatively rare in Scotland. They usually involve feasting and dancing, features common to descriptions of the fairies, but they never involve accounts of cannibalism. The emphasis in the Scottish trials was on the demonic pact, requiring only a single encounter with the Devil. (Larner 1981 p.145)

The demonic pact was the most developed feature of the witchcraft trials. Often the accused witch was said to have placed one hand on her head and the other of the sole of one

foot, and to have promised everything between her two hands to the Devil. The Devil would pinch her, leaving a mark which was thereafter insensible to pain. As early as 1591, and throughout the seventeenth century, it was common practice to search an accused witch for this Devil's mark. This was widely accepted as evidence and was often done with the consent of the suspected witches, who hoped to prove their innocence. Christina Larner has argued that this is the strongest evidence of the influence of learned demonology on popular witch beliefs. The search for the Devil's mark could only have arisen from the belief in the demonic pact, and would not make sense in any other context. (Larner 1981 p.110-112) This is not necessarily the case. In 1588 Alison Pearson claimed that the first time she met the fairies "scho gatt ane fair straik ... the mark quhair of wes blae and ewill faurrit; quhilk mark scho felt nocht."¹⁰ (Pitcairn 1833 I part 2 p.167) Andro Man said that one of the fairies had "beatt a mark in the third fynger of his richt hand." (Spalding Club 1841 p.120-121) This could still demonstrate the influence of demonic beliefs, but evidently at this time there was some confusion between the fairies and the Devil.

Andro was not the only man to be accused of witchcraft. In 1578 two commissions of Justiciary were issued in Inverness-shire demanding the arrest of several witches in connection with the trial of Lady Munro of Foulis. Both commissions named "Keanoch Ower" as the "principal or leader in the art of magic." Willian Matheson has identified this man with the prophet Coinneach Odhar who, according to tradition, was burned to death for witchcraft on Chanonry point in Fortrose. (Matheson 1971 p.3-7) This was at that time a major ecclesiastical centre. If similar trials and executions were handled by the church then this could explain

¹⁰ She got a fair stroke ... the mark where of was blue and ill-favoured; which mark she felt not.

the lack of any judicial records concerning witchcraft trials in the Highlands. In the Lowlands another man "*Doctor Fian, alias Iohn Cunningham, maister of the schoole,*" was accused of leading a coven of witches in an attempt to assassinate King James VI. (Newes 1597 p.10) Both of these cases arose from politically prominent trials, and they may have been influenced by the imported belief in demonic witchcraft. Covens were not a common feature in the early Scottish witchcraft trials. The trial in North Berwick, in particular, is one of the most significant in the history of the Scottish witchcraft trials, and it deserves some attention.

In 1589 a marriage was arranged between King James VI and Princess Anne of Denmark. Princess Anne set sail for Scotland only to be forced to port in Norway due to contrary winds. James set out to collect her and together they spent that winter in Denmark during a series of unusually long and frequent storms. The next spring when James returned to Scotland with his bride they again met with contrary winds which separated the ship from the rest of the fleet. At the same time a ship bearing wedding presents to the port of Leith sank in the Firth of Forth. Accusations of witches sinking ships had previously been recorded in Norway and Denmark, and on this occasion the admiral of the Danish fleet blamed the weather on witchcraft. (Monter 1990 p.431) King James became convinced of this, and that the witches were engaged in a deliberate attempt on his life. As a result 1591 saw the start of a major witch hunt when a coven of witches was exposed in North Berwick and charged with treason by means of witchcraft.

In the course of this trial King James's cousin, the Earl of Bothwell, was implicated in the trial of the North Berwick witches. Bothwell had earlier become involved in a feud between the Earls of Moray and Huntley which had spilt over into court politics. (Lynch 1991 p.237) A similar case

had occurred a century earlier in 1479 when a coven of witches had been accused of an attempt on the life of King James III and the Earl of Mar, the King's brother and rival, had been implicated and assassinated. (Sharpe 1884 p.34) This earlier case did not involve accounts of devil worship and it did not result in a full scale witch hunt. In 1600 the Earl of Gowrie was accused of treason and accounts of demonic magic were raised. This was the learned demonology of the educated classes which he was said to have learned while a student in Padua.

These trials had a direct effect on the course of the witchcraft trials. From about the turn of the century the fairies had become much less prominent, and accounts of continental demonic witchcraft were more common. In 1607 Isobell Haldane was asked at her trial "If she had any conversation with the farye-folk?" The inquisitor may have identified the fairies as demons. She answered that ten years earlier she "wes caryit to ane Hillside: the hill oppynit, and scho enterit in." (Pitcairn 1833 II p.537) This description is much less detailed than previous accounts, and the fairies do not appear elsewhere in her confession.

For the most part the people who were accused did not practise magic. In a study of English witchcraft accusations Keith Thomas found that most of the accusations arose out of conflicts or quarrels between neighbours. (Thomas 1971 ch.17) Christina Larner has supported this conclusion in her study of the Scottish witchcraft trials. (Larner 1981 p.90) In a study of two "classic cases" she found that neither of the accused witches had any general reputation as a healer, but they were "credited with the ability to remove an illness which (they were) responsible for". (Ibid. p.125) In this case the suspicion of witchcraft usually preceded the act of healing. The most common type of accusation involved cursing, not curing. (Ibid. p.135)

The fairies reappeared in the trial of Isobel Gowdie at

Auldearne in 1662. Isobel made a total of four confessions in April and May of that year. These contain a great deal of material combining traditional beliefs with demonic witchcraft. These often resemble the later witchcraft legends. In her first confession, on the 13th of April, Isobel was describing how she would travel to the witches sabbath.

I haid a little horse, and wold say, "Horse and hattock in the Divellis name!" And than ve vold flie away, quhair ve vold, be ewin as strawes wold flie wpon the hie-way. We will flie lyk strawes quhan we pleas; wild-strawes and corne-strawes wilbe horses to ws, an ve put thaim betwixt our foot and say, "Horse and hattock, in the Divellis name!" An quhan any sies thes strawes in a whirlwind, and doe not sanctifie them selves, we may shoot them dead at ovr pleasour. Any that ar shoot be us their sowell will goe to Hevin, bot their bodies remains with ws, and will flie as our horsis, als small as strawes.

I was in the Downie-Hills, and got meat ther from the Qwein of Fearrie, mor than I could eat. The Qwein of Fearrie is brawlie clothed in whyt linens, and in whyt and browne clothes, &c., and the King of Fearrie is a braw man, weill favoured, and broad faced, &c. There wes elf-bullis rowtting and stoylling up and downe thair, and affrighted me.¹¹ (Pitcairn 1833 III part 2 p.603-604)

¹¹ I had a little horse, and would say, "Horse and hattock in the Devil's name!" And than we would fly away, where we would, be even as straws would fly upon the high-way. We will fly like straws when we please; wild-straws and corn-straws will be horses to us, when we put them between our feet and say, "Horse and hattock, in the Devil's name!" And when any(one) sees these straws in a whirlwind, and does not sanctify (ie. cross) themselves, we may shoot them dead at our pleasure. Any that are shot by us their soul will go to Heaven, but their bodies remain with us, and will fly as our horses, as small as straws.

I was in the Downie-Hills, and got meat there from the Queen of Fairy, more than I could eat. The Queen of Fairy is finely clothed in white linens, and in white and brown clothes, &c., and the King of Fairy is a handsome man, well favoured, and broad faced, &c. There was elf-bulls roaring and bellowing up and down there, and (they) frightened me.

At this point Isobel's confession was cut short by her inquisitor. She had drifted away from the learned belief in demonic magic. This account shows an interesting combination of motifs from several different sources. The use of the phrase "Horse and Hattock" is familiar from accounts of the fairies. A similar account was recorded in a letter dated 1694 concerning the Lord of Duffus in the shire of Moray.

When he was walking abroad in the fields, near to his own house, he was suddenlie carried away, and found next day at *Paris*, in the FRENCH KING'S cellar, with a silver cup in his hand. That being brought into the KING'S presence, and questioned by him, "who he was?" and "how he came thither?" He told his name, his country and his place of residence; and that on such a day of the month (which proved to be the day immediately proceeding), being in the fields, he heard a noise of a whirlwind, and of voices crying "HORSE AND HATTOCK!" (This being the word which the FAIRIES are said to use when they remove from any place;) whereupon he cried "HORSE AND HATTOCK!" also, and was immediately caught up and transported through the air, by the FAIRIES, to that place; where, after he had drank heartily, he fell asleep, and before he awoke, the rest of the company were gone, and left him in the posture wherein he was found. (Pitcairn 1833 III part 2 p.604 note 3) ¹²

This is a migratory legend ML 5006*¹³: "The Ride with the Fairies", known at least throughout Britain. A similar legend has also been told concerning witches, ML 3045: "Following the Witch". In Scottish variants of this legend someone sees some witches putting on caps or bonnets and crying out "London again!" then flying up the chimney. He tries the same thing and immediately finds himself transported to the basement of an inn in London. (MacCulloch

¹² The letter, dated May 24 1694, was written by a Mr. Stewart, tutor to the family of Duffus, to John Aubrey. He attributes the account to William Sutherland of Duffus who died in 1626.

¹³ ML numbers with asterisks have been introduced to Christiansen's index by Katherine Briggs (1971).

1922 p.209) Often there is a lengthy conclusion. Variants of this legend are very popular in the Gaelic speaking Highlands, however the invocation is commonly repeated in English. This has led Alan Bruford to suggest that this legend was originally imported from the Lowlands. (Bruford 1967 p.27) The similarities between these two migratory legends and Isobel Gowdie's confession suggests that they are related. ML 3045: "Following the Witch" could have been adapted from ML 5006*: "The Ride with the Fairies" during the time of the witchcraft trials, but in this case the phrase "Horse and Hattock" is problematic. The word *hattock* means "a little hat" and probably refers to the cap or bonnet worn in the witchcraft legend. Apparently the two legends were derived from a common source sharing features with both.

On the 3rd of May, in a second confession, Isobel claimed the power to raise or lay the wind. "We haw no power of rain, bot ve will rease the wind quhan ve pleas." (Pitcairn 1823 III part III p.607) The belief that witches could control the wind is well documented, and as recently as the end of the nineteenth century sailors were in the practice of buying a fair wind from witches. (Marwick 1975 p.53-54) "Morag (from Scourie) earned a profitable living by selling favourable winds to mariners. Her fee was 6d. and not many masters of vessels would leave the roadstead without paying it to propitiate her." (Robertson 1961 p.90-91) Similar beliefs have been recorded in the West Country. (Brown T. (1981) p.151-152)

This motif occurs in a popular folk legend in which crew of a ship buys three winds in the form of three straws or a string with three knots, usually with the warning not to untie the third knot. In a variant of this legend MacMhuirich Mór was said to have summoned three winds to drive his ship. The first was a fair breeze; the second was stronger, and the third was a "blast from Hell" which almost

sank his ship. (Carmichael 1928 V p.306-313)¹⁴

The MacMhuirichs were the hereditary line of poets and historians to the MacDonalds of Clanranald. They may have acquired their reputation for magic from their prominent position, and their education. Another legend is told in South Uist of how witches failed to sink a ship carrying Alasdair MacDonald and Lachlan Dubh MacMhuirich.

Alasdair, Laird of Boisdale wanted to marry MacLeod of Dunvegan's daughter, and he left Loch Boisdale with a ship's crew to ask MacLeod for her. He took Dark-Haired Lachlan son of Donald MacMhuirich with him. MacLeod's daughter had two maids in waiting and they were afraid that if the Lord of Boisdale got their mistress then they would not be needed any longer. One of them was a witch, and what did they do but set off, the pair of them, to meet the Uist ship in the form of two ravens. When they reached it, the witch settled on the masthead and the other flew round her crying to her: "Drown Alasdair of the Cows! Drown Alasdair of the Cows!"

But her reply was always: "How can I drown Alasdair of the Cows with Dark Lachlan son of Donald MacMhuirich hunched over the tiller?"

In the end Lachlan reached for his gun and loaded it with a silver coin. He shot at one of the ravens and knocked out a shower of her feathers. They fled at that.

The Laird of Boisdale kept on his course, and when they got to Dunvegan the whole household was in confusion because one of MacLeod's daughter's maids was ill. "I'll cure her," said MacMhuirich. He went in to her room.

"You imp of Hell!" said he, "if you had stayed in your own place this wouldn't have happened to you!"

He rubbed the muzzle of the gun three times round the wound and it healed. However, the story doesn't tell whether the Laird of Boisdale got the hand of MacLeod's daughter or not. (Matheson 1981 p.308)

This may refer to an actual event from the eighteenth century when these men lived. It is a reversal of a legend told as an historical account of a ship wreck in 1671 when

¹⁴ Dr. Hilda Ellis Davidson has directed my attention to E.J. Moyne's Raising the Wind (1981) University of Delaware, but I have been unable to find a copy.

Iain Garbh MacLeod of Rasaay was drowned.

In the trial of 1591 the witches accused of trying to sink King James's ship were said to have set sail in sieves. (Newes 1591 p.13) Accounts of witches travelling by using a sieve or an eggshell as a boat have also been recorded in folk-legend.

A woman in Waternish told her husband that she was much annoyed by two neighbours, witches, asking her to go with them. The husband told her that he would take her place, which he accordingly did. The witches went to the seashore, and getting into a sieve, set sail, while he was given a string to hold, which I suppose was attached to the sieve. He let the string go, and the witches were drowned. Going home he told his wife that she had no more to fear from her persecutors. (MacCulloch 1922 p.210)

The motif of witches riding in sieves was also mentioned in Hungarian witchcraft trials where it was explicitly linked with the use of sieves in shamanism. (Klaniczay 1990 p.246+248) There may be some relationship between the use of sieves as ships in Scottish witchcraft legends and the practice of divination using a sieve and scissors widely documented in England, (Thomas 1971 p.213-214) but I have been unable to find any clear connection.

The most common migratory legend in Scotland concerning witches is ML 3055: "The Witch that was Hurt" describing a witch transforming herself into a hare. This features in Isobel Gowdie's third confession from the 15th of May.

"I wes on morning, about the break of day, going to Auldearn in the shap of ane hair, and Patrick Papleyis serwandis, in Kilhill, being goeing to ther labouring, his houndis being with them, ran efter me, being in the shape of an haire. I ran werie long, but wes forcet, being wearie, at last to take my own hous ... The dowgis will somtymes get som byttis of vs quhan ve ar in hairis, bot will not get ws killed. Quhan we turn owt of a hairis liknes to owr awin shap, we will haw the

byttis, and rywys, and scrattis in owr bodies."¹⁵
(Picairn 1833 III part 2 p.611)

Accounts of witches transforming themselves into hares have been recorded elsewhere in Britain and in Denmark. Isobel also mentioned witches transforming themselves into rooks and cats. (Ibid. p.813) Variants of ML 3055 do not follow any single recurrent outline. The belief that injuries received while in animal form will be retained when the witch transforms back into a human is often the only recurrent motif.

In Estonia in 1651 an eighteen year old man named Hans confessed to being a werewolf. He said that once he had been attacked by dogs while in wolf form, and that after returning to human form he found the dogs' teeth marks on his leg. The inquisitors took this as evidence that he had been physically transformed into a wolf, not just his spirit. (Madar 1990 p.271) This is not necessarily the case. In 1691 Robert Kirk suggested that the animal form was only the witch's astral body sent out while the "gross" body was left behind. He argued that through a union of nature "werewolves' and witches' true bodies are wounded at home when their astral bodies are stricken elsewhere." (Kirk 1691 p.75) This is not consistent with many of the legends. In another legend identified as a variant of ML 3055: "The Witch that was Hurt" the witches were said to transform others into horses by use of a magic bridle. This trick is turned against the witch,

¹⁵ I was one morning, about the break of day, going to Auldearn in the shape of a hare, and Patrick Papley's servants, in Kilhill, were going to their labouring. His hounds being with them, ran after me, being in the shape of a hare. I ran very long, but was forced, being weary, at last to take to my own house ... The dogs will sometimes get some bites of us when we are in (the shapes of) hares, but will not get us killed. When we turn out of a hare's likeness to our own shape, we will have the bites, and tears, and scratches in our bodies.

and while in horse form she is shod. When she is transformed back into human form the horse shoes are still attached to her hands and feet.¹⁶ (MacCulloch 1922 p.307) This cannot be explained through an astral union of nature, and suggests that the witch was physically transformed. There is evidence that these accounts were taken seriously. In 1727 Janet Horne of Dornoch, the last "witch" to be executed in Scotland, was accused of having transformed her own daughter into a pony and having had her shod by the Devil. Her daughters deformed hand was taken as evidence against her.

The most persistent and well documented belief concerning witches in Scotland was that they could steal or divert milk from a neighbour's cow, or "take the profit" of the milk so that it could not be made into butter. This belief was known on the continent, and one method for doing this was described in an inquisitor's handbook, the Malleus Maleficarum or "Hammer of Witches", published in 1487. "A witch will sit down in a corner of her house with a pail between her legs, stick a knife or some instrument in the wall or post, and make as if to milk it with her hands ... And suddenly the devil takes the milk from the udder of that cow, and brings it to where the witch is sitting, as if it were flowing from the knife." This method, without the reference to the Devil, is found in some variants of ML 3035: "The Witch's Daughter".

A witch had a grand-daughter, and they were believed to charm away the milk of cows. The minister went to inquire into the truth of this story and asked the girl if she could give him milk, knowing well that she and her grandmother possessed no cow. She said her grandmother had taught her how to have milk at all times. She then went to the "swee" which supported the

¹⁶ In some variants of this legend the man rides the witch, and on the way she tries to trick him into saying the name of God to break the spell, as in ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil". (Bruford 1967 p.20)

three legged pot. The milk came, and after a while was followed by blood. The girl, at the sight of this, exclaimed, "The minister's cow will die if I do not stop." The minister then hastened home to find his cow almost dead of exhaustion. (MacCulloch 1922 p.210-211)

Often in this legend the witch's daughter wants to stop, but the minister insists that she continue until blood appears in the milk. The witch is rarely punished in these variants of this legend, and Alan Bruford has commented that "the point of the story is evidently to demonstrate the practice or belief." (Bruford 1967 p.23) In other variants the witch's daughter is said to sink a ship at sea. This practice was described by Ernest Marwick in The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland. "A Norway *kap* (small wooden Bowl) was placed on the surface of a tub of water, or the milk in the churn. The witch pronounced spells until the liquid became so agitated that the *kap* was filled with water and overwhelmed." (Marwick 1975 p.54) The same method was described in a legend from the Isle of Skye. (MacCulloch 1922 p.211) These accounts may be related to legends of wizards sinking ships, but I have not been able to find any clear connection. In these variants she is inevitably executed or banished. Bo Almquist has suggested a separate type number for this legend ML 3036: "The Ship Sinking Witch".

Witches were also said to steal milk while in the form of hares, and this features in some variant of ML 3055: "The Witch that was Hurt". Bruford has summarized the legend type. "A man sees a hare milking his cows. He shoots at it, but always misses until on a wise person's advice he loads a silver bullet. He shoots at it, or it is wounded by his dogs. He follows the limping animal to a neighbour's house, where it goes under the door... When he gets there he finds the woman on her sick bed wounded in the same place as the animal." (Bruford 1967 p.16) "This is the most persistent and widespread legend about witches in the British Isles."

(Ibid.)

Other methods of stealing milk involve borrowing a piece of coal, or burning peat, from a neighbour, or a piece of string or yarn could be drawn through the grass to collect the early morning dew and draw milk from the neighbours' cows. In 1723 Margaret Robinson of Byres in Balmerino charged James Paton of Culter with defamation, claiming that he had accused her of using a similar method to take away her neighbour's butter, (Campbell, J.G. 1899 p.462) and in 1880 the principal Free Kirkers of Uig charged a mother and her daughters with having taken milk from the neighbour's cows by witchcraft. (Donaldson 1923 p.169)¹⁷ Similar accusations have been recorded in the Shetlands well into the twentieth century.¹⁸

There are a few major points which can be drawn from this material. Accounts of individuals visiting the fairies were well known in Scotland at the beginning of the witchcraft trials, and they feature in a number of the early confessions. Variants of the migratory legend ML 5070: "Midwife to the Fairies", in particular, appear in the confessions of both Bessie Dunlop and Andro Man. These accounts resemble descriptions of shamanism from elsewhere in Europe. Several of the early witches claimed to be in contact with the spirits of the dead, or those who had been taken away by the fairies. The relationship between the fairies and the dead has often been commented on, but there is no clear consensus among the sources. There are also several accounts of people using magic stones to prophesy or heal, but there is not enough evidence to link these to the fairies.

The first major witch hunt in Scotland began in 1591,

¹⁷ For further reference on butter stealing rites see Lysaght p.31-37 from Davidson (ed.) 1993.

¹⁸ From comments made by Alan Bruford in conversation.

and by the turn of the century the imported belief in demonic magic had become more prominent in the trials. This was supported by a number of well publicized, politically motivated trials at this time. There is some evidence for the diabolization of fairy beliefs, especially in the trial of Andro Man in 1597. This is reflected in the legends ML 3045: "Following the Witch" and ML 5006*: "The Ride with the Fairies". The belief that the fairies were angels cast out of heaven at the fall of Lucifer is obviously a product of Christian imagery, and may have been a response to the diabolization of the fairies. However after the turn of the century popular fairy beliefs do not appear to have played a significant role in the witchcraft trials.

Many of the accounts from Isobel Gowdie's confession are consistent with later witchcraft legends. Descriptions of witches transforming themselves into animals occur in variants of ML 3055: "The Witch that was Hurt". These may have been influenced by shamanism, but, like accounts of visiting the fairies, it is clear that the witches were believed to be transformed physically, and not just in spirit. The belief that witches could affect shipping by raising or laying the wind were first recorded in Scandinavia, and may have been imported to Scotland at the time of the witchcraft trials. Accounts of witches stealing milk also have parallels elsewhere in Europe. Both of these motifs occur in variants on ML 3035: "The Witch's Daughter".

There are relatively few female magicians in Icelandic folk legends from the nineteenth century. These women are not the typical witches of European folklore, stealing milk or flying to sabbaths. They are seldom portrayed as healers or midwives. Yet the magic which they perform is different from that practised by the wizards. They are not associated with the Devil. They do not mediate between humans and the supernatural. There is an element of shamanism in their

legends, but they are not associated with ghosts or fairies. The most prominent of the female magicians is Halla of Straumfjörður, who lived in the fifteenth century. One tradition claims that she was the sister of Sæmundur the Wise, although she lived roughly three hundred and fifty years after he died. (Árnason I p.494) An example of the magic which she performed can be found in a legend titled "Halla goes to Market".

Once, as often happens, a ship came in to Hraunshöfn to the west. That's in the area where the shopping centre is now-a-days. Halla wanted to meet the merchants and buy some household essentials since she was in the habit of keeping her farm well supplied. She decided, as often, to take a trip to the market place west in Hraunshöfn with many horses in her train and she had twelve full grown sheep driven in addition to sell to the merchants. She went along, first up at the foot of the mountains, and then through the districts that were on her way. She went past outer Hraundal where her foster-son Ólafur lived. When Ólafur saw Halla and how things stood he said "That's a hard train, foster-mother." Then Halla said "Shut up, boy, I've taught you enough." From there Halla continued on her way, and there's nothing to say of her journey until she reached the market place and found the merchants. She brought out a great deal of butter and tallow and the sheep that she had with her, and took in exchange from the merchants what she wanted and what she could carry in her train. When she had made up her baggage train she left, but when she was gone the merchants looked again at the goods that they had bought from Halla. The butter and tallow had then turned to stones and the sheep to mice. Halla had performed an illusion (*sjónhverfing*) so that the rocks had appeared to be butter and tallow and the mice to be sheep.

This much of the legend has also been told about another female magician, Þordís Markúsdóttir. It is an international migratory legend and it has been recorded in a variant concerning a fourteenth century wizard, named Ziito, from the court of King Wenceslaus of Bohemia, later emperor of Germany. (Godwin 1834 p.275-6) However, the story of Halla

continues:

When the merchants realized that they had been tricked they were unpleasantly surprised and they gathered together some men and set out after Halla. When Halla realized that she was being followed she cast a pitch dark fog so that no one could see. The search party continued on, however, and caught up with Halla and her train at Haffjarðará, but she confused their sight so that they only saw a large empty moor and cliffs where her horses were. They found neither Halla nor her party, and had to turn back, but she continued on her way and came home to Straumfjörð safe and sound. (Árnason 1862 I p.496-497¹⁹)

A number of the motifs in this legend also occur in accounts of magic from the sagas. The pitch dark fog which Halla raised was called a *hulíðshjálmur*. In Njáls Saga (XII) the wizard Svan called up a mist in order to confuse a search party pursuing a fugitive. In a similar episode in Harðar Saga ok Holmverjar (XXV) the witch Þorbjörg Katla called up a blinding darkness to defend her farm against an attack. Conversely Isgerd in Reykðæla Saga (XIV) used a similar spell to conceal and support an attack. There are also accounts of *sjónhverfing*, or illusions, being used for similar purposes. In Eyrbyggja Saga (XX) Katla hid her son Odd from pursuers first by disguising him as a distaff, then as a goat and a third time as a boar. In another episode from Harðar Saga ok Holmverjar (XXVI) Skropa hid herself and her two foster-daughters first as three ash chests, then as a sow and two piglets. Magic foster-mothers, such as Halla's relationship to Ólafur, were another recurrent feature in the sagas. In Heiðarvíga Saga (XXIII) Bardi had a foster-mother name Kjannok who practised magic, as did Helga's foster-mother in Kormáks Saga (I) and Hroi's in Reykðæla Saga (V).

The type of magic which all of these women practised was

¹⁹ Recorded by Þorkell Eyjólfsson

called seiðr. In 1935 the Swedish scholar Dag Strömbäck published a study of seiðr in which he demonstrated that it resembled certain shamanistic practices among the Lapps. H.R. Ellis Davidson has followed this up. In particular she has drawn links between the Icelandic foster-mothers and the shaman's "spirit-wife" who would both teach the shaman and protect him throughout his life.²⁰ She has argued that the type of shamanism that seiðr resembles was closer to that practised by the Bulgars of the Volga or the Finno-Ugric Biarmians. Her main argument for this lies in the absence in the sagas of the use of the drum characteristic of Lapp shamanism. (Davidson 1973 p.38)²¹

The connection between shamanism and the magic practised by the female magicians in the legends from the nineteenth century is more obvious in one of the other accounts.

Once Halla's workmen wanted to go fishing, but she would have rather let them do something else. She thought the weather looked threatening and told them that they wouldn't have a good day fishing. Despite what she said they went rowing out to Leir, which is a fishing ground off of Mýrar, the deep part near Þormóðssker. But when they shipped oars a sharp wind rose from the north and a storm rose up so quickly that they couldn't hold out. They set out and headed for land, but didn't get far, and finally just barely reached Þormóðssker. There they discussed whether they should continue, and decided to go on. But when they reached the current in front of Svartafles the weather got worse and they couldn't go any further. It was getting dark and they couldn't land at Þormóðssker because of the waves and it was clear that they would be driven out to sea.

²⁰ In the seventeenth century Jón Guðmundsson the Learned offered a different account of Halla's relationship with Ólafur Tóni. He wrote that Ólafur had once tried his magic against Halla, "and she who had learned in the mounds was thought better than he (who had learned) in the schools." (Einarsson 1975 p.lxxxiv)

²¹ For further reference concerning seiðr see Davidson (1990) from Temenos #26

When they were in this predicament they saw a whale which ran past their boat and headed for land. Halla's foster-son Ólafur was on board. He advised the ship mates to row after the whale. They did so, and found themselves drawn in the whale's wake to land. When they came to the mouth of the port the whale disappeared. In that way they reached land safe and sound. When they'd landed Halla came down to the strand and asked whether they'd seen anything, and they told her the truth of what had happened on their trip. She said that they wouldn't have reached land without her help, and advised them not to row out again when she was opposed to it. It's believed that Halla had been that whale that had saved them and that she had put the appearance of a whale on herself. (Árnason 1862 I p.496)

Another episode in Kormáks Saga (XVIII) may be related to this. "When the brothers left anchorage a walrus came up to the boat. Kormák threw a spear at it which hit the walrus and it sank. Some men thought that they could recognize Þórveig's eyes. The walrus didn't come up after that, but it was heard about Þórveig that she lay dangerously ill and it's said that she died from this." A similar account was recorded in Shetland during the witchcraft trials. In 1644 Marion Pardone was "proved" to have swum out to sea in the shape of a porpoise to upset a four-oared boat and drown its crew. (Marwick 1975 p.49)

In a related account from the *Chronicon Norwegiae* a group of Norwegian merchants saw a Saami shaman enter a trance, then fall down dead. It was explained to them that he had sent his spirit out in the form of a whale, and that he had been ambushed by another shaman hiding in a lake in the form of a sharp stick. (Davidson 1973) p.31 In some forms of shamanism it was believed that the shamans could send their spirits out in the form of an animal, and that if the animal was injured or killed then the shaman would sicken and die as well. (Czaplicka 1914 p.183) The significant difference between this and descriptions of witches transforming themselves into hares is that in seiðr the magician's body is left lying in a trance.

Both Strömbäck and Davidson assumed that the belief in *seiðr*, or shamanism, was imported into Iceland from the east, and that the tradition ended with the conversion to Christianity. Davidson even argues that "these tales of magic can hardly be based on shamanistic practices within Iceland itself", (Davidson 1973 p.39) however she offers no evidence to support this assertion. An account in Eiríks Saga Rauða (IV) described a *spákona*, or prophetess, sitting on a pallet and consulting with *náttúrur*, or spirits, while making prophesies for the people present one by one. This account is similar to some descriptions of Siberian shamans. (Czaplicka 1914 p.192-4) The *spákona* is described wearing an elaborate costume with a staff, a hood and a cloak dyed either blue or black. Blue-coat was later to become a standard name for witches in Icelandic *märchen*. This is followed by a long description of the feast prepared to welcome her, and the proper customs which were observed. These detailed description suggest that these features were unfamiliar to the saga audience. This episode took place in Greenland, and it may have been intended to appear exotic.

The account begins, "There was a woman in the community named Þorbjörg. She was a *spákona*... She had had nine sisters, and they were all *spákonur*, but she was the only one then alive." This suggests that the practice was thought to be dying out. At one point she required another woman to assist her by chanting a spell to summon the spirits. Only one woman could be found who had been taught the chant by her foster-mother in Iceland. Such a feature would not likely have been introduced if it would have seemed unrealistic or alien to an Icelandic audience. At first the woman refused to assist because she was a Christian. The *spákona* responded, "It could be that you can be a help to the people here, and you will not be a worse woman than before." Finally the woman agreed. This passage makes it clear that Christians opposed *seiðr* as a pagan practice, however the

saga writer may have been reflecting a more positive popular attitude.

This opposition had been expressed in early eleventh century England in Ælfric's description of "wicce cræft" from his Lives of the Saints (XVII). "Some wise women say that witches oft say such and it happens in such a manner. Now we say that the invisible devil who flies around the world and sees many things tells these witches what they say to men." This could describe witches consulting with spirits in a manner resembling seiðr, but it clearly demonstrates an early diabolization of the witch beliefs. Another account in Vatnsdæla Saga (X) from the thirteenth century described a *spákona* in tenth century Iceland named Finna. "Finna was set high and around her was prepared magnificently. Men went there each from his place to ask their fates. She prophesied for each who came to her, and it was uneven how each enjoyed it." In this account the spirits were not mentioned, and Finna was explicitly said to be practicing seiðr "after the old customs". This account was written in the thirteenth century, but the events described were said to have taken place in late pagan times.

There are some accounts in the sagas of magicians being stoned to death for having used their magic to cause harm to others, for example Katla in Eyrbyggja Saga (XX) or Þórgrímur Nef in Gísli Saga (XIX), but there does not appear to have been any general condemnation of seiðr when it was put to benevolent uses. The attitude reflected in the nineteenth century folk-legends is equally ambiguous. Halla was said to have been a good Christian "although she practised the old knowledge" and she was buried in consecrated ground. (Ibid. I p.498²²) A much different fate awaited Þórdís Markúsdóttir. Once the Rev. Eiríkur told her that she'd go

²² Recorded by Magnús Grímsson from Halldór Guðmundsson from Ferjukot in Borgarfjórður

to Hell when she died. Þordís asked "Do you think so, Eiríkur?" Eiríkur said "Never doubt it." Her answer to this is difficult to translate grammatically, but taken literally it means "So shall dance." (Ibid. III p.579²³)

There is little evidence for the practice of *seiðr* in the folk-magic traditions collected in the nineteenth century. Spirits could be summoned to predict the future. The verb used for summoning is "*seiða*", but the methods described do not resemble the passage in Eiríks Saga. Despite Davidson's claim the evidence suggests that *seiðr* was practised in Iceland, but that it did not survive the conversion to Christianity. The accounts of the female magicians in the legends may have been preserved through the oral tradition after the practice itself had disappeared, or they may have been influenced by descriptions of *seiðr* in the sagas which continued to be read aloud in Icelandic homes into the twentieth century.

The first laws against sorcery, soothsaying and "sitting out to wake up trolls"²⁴ were introduced from Norway in 1281, however the Icelandic people complained that they were too strict and did not reflect Icelandic customs. (Jóhannesson 1956 VII p.21) There is no evidence that they were ever enforced prior to the seventeenth century. In 1625 Jón Rögnvaldsson was accused of having woken up a ghost which killed some horses and caused a boy to fall ill. This is the first reference equating a *sending* with the practice of waking up spirits. Jón's brother, Þorvald, argued against the charge claiming that Jón was too "simple" and lacked the necessary power to do magic. This argument followed

²³ Recorded by Brynnjólfur from Minnanúp

²⁴ This last term was later revised and expanded to "sitting out to wake up trolls or land spirits in waterfalls or mounds." (Hastrup 1990 b p.211) It is described in Kristni Saga (XI) and was apparently a form of divination.

traditional Icelandic beliefs regarding magic as a kind of knowledge requiring intelligence. However the sheriff, Magnús Björnsson had been educated in Hamburg and Copenhagen and was familiar with the continental notion of the demonic pact. A law introduced during the Reformation allowed local sheriffs appointed in Denmark to take action in any case of heresy. On this basis Jón was tried locally and sentenced to death. (Hastrup 1990 c p.392)

The Danish law against witchcraft, introduced in 1630, made a distinction between simple magicians, who could be banished, and those who had made an actual pact with the Devil and were to be executed. One of the first to be prosecuted under this new law was Jón Guðmundsson, the Learned. Jón's reputation has survived in legend. He is said to have composed several verses which caused a storm wrecking a pirate ship in the West-fjords. This poem has been preserved, along with another with which he had later laid a ghost on Snæfellsness peninsula. (Ibid. p.202+219) An account recorded in the nineteenth century comments that Jón was poorly rewarded for his help in defeating the pirates. In fact he was driven from the area having protested at the slaughter of shipwrecked men. (Ólason 1944 p.255) The pirates were later retrospectively outlawed at the next Alþing justifying their killing. Jón was later accused of teaching magic, and of publishing and selling a book of spells. He was convicted and sentenced to exile. His case was appealed directly to the King, but the sentence was upheld. According to contemporary accounts, however, none of the Danish merchants were willing to take him on their ships, and he was allowed to settle in the East of Iceland. (Ólason 1944 V p.)

The next execution did not take place until 1654. On this occasion three men were executed within a few days at the same place. All three had been prosecuted by the same man, another sheriff named Þorleif Kortsson. A year later

the Rev. Jón Magnússon complained of being haunted by "ghost-devils". This was the first recorded reference to devils in the Icelandic witchcraft trials. He accused a father and son of having bewitched him, and succeeded in having them executed. When the hauntings continued he charged the elder man's daughter, but she was acquitted and successfully sued the Rev. Jón for damages. He retired to write a lengthy complaint on the lenient practices of the Icelandic courts. The remainder of the executions were spread out over a period from 1667 to 1685, primarily occurring in the West-fjords. Kirsten Hastrup has pointed out that in most of these cases the accusations can be traced to particular sheriffs or clergy. (Ibid. p.385)

One of the most prominent individuals in the Icelandic witchcraft trials was the Rev. Páll Björnsson. Páll had been educated in Copenhagen. He returned to Iceland in 1644. In 1645 he settled in a parish in the West-fjords and the following year he married Helga Halldórsdóttir from the area. In 1660 Helga fell ill, but quickly recovered. Her illness recurred in 1668 and this time Páll became convinced that witchcraft was responsible. Helga had recently prevented Jón Leifsson from marrying one of her servant girls, and this was considered sufficient motive. Under questioning Jón implicated another man with having taught him magic, and both were executed. Helga never fully recovered and over the next fifteen years Páll, and his brother the magistrate Eggert Björnsson, had another five people executed for bewitching her and members of her family. In 1679 this included the only woman to be burnt as a witch in Iceland, Þuríður Olafsdóttir, along with her young son. (Björnsson 1976 p.12)

In 1674 Páll Björnsson wrote his Character Bestiæ outlining the continental belief in demonic witchcraft. In it he drew extensively on classical and biblical references. He concerned himself primarily with demonology, and defined a magician as someone who "calls the Devil to their service

and makes a pact with that evil spirit" (ch.XII). Little mention was made of contemporary Icelandic traditions, except to reconcile the more obvious differences. He devoted a chapter apiece to books of magic (ch.XIV) and the practice of summoning the spirits of the dead (ch.XVII), which he claimed were only demons in disguise. He mentioned the witches sabbath only once, summarizing the Malleus Maleficarum, but he described it, along with Lapp shamanism, as a foreign practice.

There is no evidence that the belief in demonic witchcraft had any substantial influence on the Icelandic witchcraft trials. The high percentage of men accused in the trials, along with references to books of magic, demonstrates that the wizard tradition continued to dominate both popular and learned perceptions of magic. It is ironic that the one identifiable wizard accused, Jón the Learned, was not executed. Most of the accusations were raised by sheriffs and clergy who had been educated abroad, and there does not appear to have been any general condemnation of magic.

The practice of *seiðr* has survived into the nineteenth century legends, especially those concerning Halla of Straumfjörðr. This practice resembles some accounts of shamanism, and may be related to witchcraft. All three share the feature of transformations into animal form, except that in *seiðr* and shamanism the transformation was said to take place in spirit while the magician's body remained lying in a trance. This is the same explanation which Robert Kirk gave for the transformation in witchcraft, but it is not consistent with the witchcraft legends.

Female magicians sometimes appear in secondary or supporting roles in the Icelandic wizard legends. In these accounts there is no identifiable difference in the type of magic which they perform. However, there is often an element of conflict or competition involved. One example describes

a competition between the Rev. Hálfðan and an old woman named Ólöf of Lónkot.

In Lónkot in the Rev. Hálfðan of Fell's parish there lived an old woman named Ólöf. She was very skilled in magic and she and Hálfðan had many difficult times. One autumn Hálfðan rowed out fishing with his men, and they pulled in a large flounder. It was very rough weather and the men were cold. When they began complaining of the cold the priest said, "What do you suppose you'd give me to pull up a hot sausage to refresh us, boys?" They said that he couldn't do that, though he might want to, but a little later Hálfðan pulled up a hot sausage on his hook. All the ship mates ate it and they thought it good. In the meanwhile the flounder disappeared from the ship. Then the Rev. Hálfðan said "The old woman wants something for her turn". He had summoned the sausage from Ólöf, and she had taken the flounder from him. (Árnason 1862 I p.500²⁵)

This legend has also been told about the Rev. Hálfðan and an old woman named Steinunn of Tjörn. (Ibid. III p.537²⁶) The earliest variant of this legend was recorded by Jón Eggertsson around the end of the seventeenth century. In this account the sausage was stolen but there was no reference to any response nor to a female magician. A similar account was recorded in Shetland. A man named Luggie, reportedly executed during the witchcraft trials, was said to be able to let down a fishing line, and bring up a sausage "well" boiled and roasted. (Marwick 1975 p.49) In another legend, often told as a sequel to this tale, the element of competition is replaced with cooperation.

Once the Rev. Hálfðan had a good lot of hay. He strongly forbade any of his workmen from going out that night and said that a great deal depended on it. He then had the old woman Ólöf bind all of the bales and

²⁵ Recorded by Magnús Grímsson "From a school boy from the north."

²⁶ Recorded by Jón of Gautlönd

bring the hay down herself. With each bale that she bound the old woman said, "Up, up and home to the Rev. Hálfðan." The bales then flew to Hálfðan and he took them and said, "Down - as you ought to lie." They continued that all night until the hay was finished. It's said that an old woman went out that night and lost her senses. (Ibid. I p.501²⁷)

In a variant of this legend with Steinunn the element of competition is made more explicit. At the end Hálfðan admits that he couldn't have kept up if he hadn't had one more workman than she knew about. (Ibid. I p.504²⁸) This may be a reference to the belief that powerful wizards could order the Devil to work for them. Several variants of this legend have also been recorded in which the female magician is simply identified as a nameless old woman. In another variant with Sæmundur the Learned the other magician is identified as his sister Halla of Straumfjörður. (Ibid. I p.478-479²⁹)

In another legend concerning the Rev. Eiríkur and Þordís Markúsdóttir of Stokkseyri the element of competition borders on outright antagonism.

One time it happened that Þordís, who was called Stokkseyrar-Dísa, sent the Rev. Eiríkur a beautiful blue jerkin with a red border. She did this to try herself with him.

Now it happened that one Sunday in winter the Rev. Eiríkur decided to ride to church, and to have a man with him. When they had started on their way the priest said to his companion that he should cut the jerkin off him if he should see anything happen when they saw the church. They continued on their way. The companion watched carefully to see when he could see the church. As soon as he saw it he looked at the priest. He saw that he fell from his horse and looked as if he were

²⁷ Recorded by Magnús Grímsson "From a school boy from the north"

²⁸ Recorded by Jón of Gautlönd

²⁹ Recorded by the Rev. Þorsteinn Þórarinnsson

burning, as he turned blue and swelled up. It wasn't long before the man had taken his knife out and cut the jerkin off him. The priest returned to normal.

That winter the Rev. Eiríkur was at work spinning grey wool. He then started knitting and knitted a slip. He sent that slip to Þordís. She thought the slip was good as it was thick and warm. One day there was a snow storm with frost. She put the slip on to keep warm. Late in the day she went out to empty her chamber pot. That evening the Rev. Eiríkur was sitting at home when there was a knocking at the door. The Rev. Eiríkur forbade anyone from going out. Then there was a knocking again, and harder than the first time. The priest said that there was no need to hurry to the door. Then there was a third, very weak, knocking. The Rev. Eiríkur then stood up and went to the door. There was Dísa, more dead than alive from the cold and bad weather, holding on to her chamber pot. The Rev. Eiríkur greeted her warmly and asked her how she happened to be out. She said that he should know how that happened and asked him to let her in so that she wouldn't die there outside. She was there that night, and was treated hospitably, and they agreed then not to provoke each other. (Ibid. III p.522³⁰)

In another variant of this tale featuring a nameless old woman Eiríkur ends with the comment "It's not good to provoke the Rev. Eiríkur." (Ibid. III p.523³¹) In a third variant we are told that the female magician was the daughter of a priest, and that she and Eiríkur were later married. (Ibid. III p.521-522³²) Similar legends are relatively rare in Scotland. One example from the Highlands concerns MacDonald of Keppoch.

Another time Keppoch and his dairymaid had a trial of skill in sorcery. While she was milking a cow in the cattlefold, MacDonald, who was looking on, by his charms prevented the cow from yielding milk. The dairy maid removed to the other side of the cow and defeated his conjurations. He then removed the hoop of the milk

³⁰ Collected by Markús Gíslason

³¹ Recorded by Brynnjólfur from Minnanúp

³² Recorded by Magnús Grímsson

pail. This she also counteracted. (Campbell, J.G. 1900 p.288)

In this account the woman does not actually practise magic, she simply counters MacDonald's spells. In these legends the male wizards are the central figures. The action begins and ends with the men and it usually follows their perspective throughout. Often the female magician is portrayed only as a nameless old woman, and characters like Ólöf of Lónkot and Steinunn of Tjörn only appear in legends concerning Hálfðan and never on their own. They are either presented as being roughly equal, or else the men are more powerful.

The continental belief in demonic witchcraft had some influence on popular legends. One account from the nineteenth century described a creature called a Tilberi or Snakkur which could be sent to steal milk.

Once a farmer in the east set out riding to seek his cows in the morning. When he reached them he saw a snakkur, grey in colour, lying over the teats of his best cow and sucking on both sides. The snakkur moved quickly when the farmer came up, and the farmer chased him on his horse. But the Snakkur slipped by one tussock and twisted over another, until he came to his home. The people were out in the field, and the snakkur shot up under the wife of the farmer there. The farmer who had chased it dismounted, went to the woman and bound her clothes below the snakkur and she was burnt. (Ibid. I 420³³)

Several variants of this legend have been recorded, all following roughly the same outline. (Ibid. I p.420-421) In some respects these resemble some variants of ML 3035: "The Witch that was Hurt" in which a witch transforms herself into a hare, except that here no transformation takes place. Similar accounts have been recorded in Norway and Sweden in which the creature is sometimes described as resembling a

³³ Told by Jón Bjarnason in Breiðavík

hare. Variants of ML 3035: "The Witch's Daughter" have also been recorded in Iceland in which a Finnish witch in Norway uses her magic to steal milk, inevitably from "The best cow in Iceland." (Ibid. III p.621-622)

The witchcraft trials had an even greater effect on the legends of the Icelandic wizards. Fewer of the wizards from the eighteenth century onwards were priests and the majority of the evil wizards are based on individuals who lived during this later period. In some cases the legends are drawn directly from the witchcraft trials.

A certain wizard named Páll lived in a cottage near Stóruborg in Hunavatns district, and that cottage was left deserted after his time. Páll killed his wife with magic in this way, he carved runes on a piece of cheese and put butter over it and gave it to her to eat. But it came out and he was condemned to be burnt, but that never happened to the wiser wizards. He was burned at Nessbjarg, but when the ashes were inspected the heart was unburnt; it was pulled apart with iron hooks and a black frog jumped out of it. After that the heart burned. (Árnason 1862 I p.585³⁴)

The use of magic runes is consistent with Icelandic magic traditions, but the motif of the black frog is characteristic of continental beliefs. The comment that "this never happened to the wiser wizards" demonstrates that the storyteller regarded this account as inconsistent with the general wizard tradition.

The typical evil wizard in Iceland is described in the legend of Jón from Hella. "A man named Jón was Guðmundsson. He lived at Hella on Árskógsströnd. He was thought to be skilled in magic and all good men were afraid of him as the word spread that he used his magic more to do others ill than to help or be of use to others, so he was rather disliked."

³⁴ Recorded by Skúli Gíslason

(Árnason 1862 I p.586³⁵) In the legend he raised a *sending* which he sent against another wizard named Jón Illugason. He is portrayed as almost the ideal of an Icelandic farmer. "He was a poor man, and kept to himself, but held fast to his part if he was pressed. Men thought that he knew a few things as was then common of anyone who didn't give in to overbearing men." (Ibid.) He managed to intercept the *sending*, and send it back to kill the evil Jón. The evil wizards rarely appeared alone in the legends. More often they were opposed by good wizards, and inevitably the evil ones were defeated.

While magic was not wholly condemned in these legends there was a growing awareness of the conflict between magic and the orthodox church. This awareness is reflected in the legends of the Reverends Snorri Björnsson and Vigfús Benediktsson, both from the eighteenth century. They are often classed as wizards, although they practised no magic. They were often presented in conflict with evil wizards.

The Rev. Snorri the Strong was appointed to the parish at Staður in Aðalvík in the Westfjords and married his predecessor's daughter, Hildur, who was a native of the area. The Westfjords had seen the worst of the witch trials and was known to be the home of evil wizards. According to legend soon after his arrival Snorri came into conflict with a local wizard called Galdra-Jón. It was said that Jón had used his magic against Snorri's predecessors, all of whom had lost their health or died early. Snorri claimed to defend himself by putting his faith in God. In the end, however, he defeated Jón by picking him up and breaking his back. He also relied on his wife who was able to predict the future by floating shells, a practice which, unfortunately, she never

³⁵ Recorded by Jón of Gautlönd

explained. (Ibid. III p.563-565³⁶)

Snorri's immediate successor to the parish was the Rev. Vigfús Benediktsson, and similar tales were told about him. His wife, Málfríður, played an even more prominent role than Hildur had. She not only predicted the spells cast against Vigfús, she used magic to counter them. Vigfús moved from Staður to Einholt at Mýrar in Austurskaftafells district, and here he continued to come in conflict with local wizards, for instance one wizard named Ólafur at Vindborðsseli.

Once the priest decided to go visiting in his parish. His wife asked him if he intended to visit in Vindborðsseli. He said he had planned to. She said that she intended to go there with him then. He wouldn't agree and said that the weather was too bad. She agreed, but advised him not to go to Vindborðsseli. Then the priest went visiting and came to Vindborðsseli a little after dark. Ólafur greeted him and invited him into the store-house and took up a flask out of a chest and put it on the table and offered it to the priest. The priest didn't sip from it at first, but after a little while he took the stopper out of the flask. In the same instant the door of the store-house burst open and Málfríður, the priest's wife, came in and said, "Fúsi, don't drink from the flask." She grabbed the flask, sipped from it and spat it out on the floor. A dog that was there in the store-house lapped it up from the floor, and promptly died. Then she said to the priest, "Now it is safe to drink." He sipped from the flask and he was unharmed. (Ibid. I p.580³⁷)

This motif is fairly common in legends about Icelandic wizards from this time, with the understanding that the danger always accompanies the first sip. It was also recorded in the version of Ólafs Saga Tryggvasonar in Flateyarbók (XLI-III-XLIV). In this account Óðinn gave a joint of meat to King Ólafur, but the king refused to eat it and threw it to his dogs. The dogs ate it and died. Vigfús also

³⁶ Recorded by Brynjólf of Minnanúp

³⁷ Recorded by the Rev. Þorstein Þorarinsson

had a foster-mother who defended him against a sending that two brothers sent against him.

The ghost continued on until it came to Einholt, but the priest had a foster-mother who knew a few things. One evening the old woman let the priest sleep in her bed, and she lay in his. In the morning when the house hold was on its feet they saw that the old woman's bedclothes were all torn asunder, and she lay in from of the bed and was so weak that she could hardly tell them about her struggle with the ghost. Though she said that the brothers wouldn't likely send the priest another sending again. Later she died. (Ibid. I p.581³⁸)

Protective magic foster-mothers were a familiar motif from accounts describing seiðr in the sagas. In these legends we find female magicians in conflict with wizards, but the roles have been reversed. The women are acting in accordance with a representative of the church against an evil male wizard threatening from outside. Apparently the Icelandic witchcraft trials had a much less damaging effect of the perception of female magicians. However the male priest is still the central figure. The women appear in supporting roles, and there are no accounts of female magicians acting alone defeating men. In the last account Vigfús's foster-mother was not even given a name.

Good wizards continued to appear in the legends into the nineteenth century, but none of them achieved the status of the earlier wizard-priests whose legends continued to remain popular. This created an obvious inconsistency. In one legend the evil wizard Loftur Þorsteinsson makes an interesting comparison. "They who have learned magic like myself cannot use it except to do ill and they are all lost when they die, but if a man knows enough then the Devil no longer has any power over him, rather he must serve him without getting anything in return as he served Sæmundur the

³⁸ Recorded by Skúli Norðdal in 1859

Wise, and whoever knows so much can decide to use his knowledge as well as he will. This knowledge is now-a-days not easy to get once the Black School closed and Bishop Gottskálk had Rauðskinna buried with him." (Árnason 1862 I p.573³⁹)

In his article "The Master Magician in Icelandic Folk Legend" B.S. Benedikz suggested that the evil wizard had appeared first in popular beliefs, and the good wizards were created as a defense against them. (Benedikz 1964 p.23) Benedikz's article is a catalogue of historical inaccuracies, and he lists as his only source the stories which he had heard "from old people of long memories, especially my great aunt Kristín Þórarinsdóttir (1863-1938)". (Ibid.p.28) In this case the article is more valuable as a statement of folk-lore than an analysis of it. It is interesting to note that as late as the beginning of the twentieth century the evil wizards were still felt to have a primacy over the good wizards, which Benedikz interpreted as chronological.

Benedikz attributed the origin of the evil wizards to a post-Reformation theology which gave greater prominence to Hell than to Heaven, and denounced many of the previously accepted church rituals as inspired by the Devil. He may have been referring to his sources when he commented that "It is not surprising to find that traces of that particular kind of intolerance still lingered in the minds of the older people of the remotest parts of the country a good three and a half centuries later." (Ibid. p.22-23) Keith Thomas offered a more developed form of the same argument when he suggested that after the Reformation in England cunning men took over many of the practices of exorcism and blessing previously performed by the clergy. (Thomas 1971 p.638-639) Kirsten Hastrup suggested much the same argument when she commented that "Historically *Svartagaldur* (black magic) came

³⁹ Recorded by Skúli Gíslason from Páll Ólafsson

to dominate over *hvítagaldur* (white magic) in the post-Reformation period." (Hastrup 1990 a p.237)

From the perspective of folk-lore it is difficult to distinguish between the influences of events in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but the evidence suggests that in popular tradition the witchcraft trials had a more significant effect on the wizard tradition than the Reformation. In Iceland many of the wizard-priests, including the Rev. Eiríkur and Hálfðan of Fell, lived in the period between the Reformation and the end of the witchcraft trials. The majority of the evil wizards did not appear until the eighteenth century. In Scotland the majority of the wizards are based on individuals who lived around the time of the witchcraft trials, and their reputations were most often based on accusations which arose during the civil wars around the end of the seventeenth century.

Conclusions

Popular beliefs in magic have traditionally been regarded as survivals of pagan superstitions preserved by a largely homogenous and unchanging peasant class. Writers from John Leland in the sixteenth century to Sir Walter Scott have readily attributed the creation of the wizard legends to a credulous "vulgar". However, this study has shown that the wizard tradition is derived from several sources. The magic beliefs on which the legends were based were formulated and perpetuated by educated Christians from the twelfth century to the end of the middle ages. As the legends were assimilated into the different cultures they were influenced by popular beliefs and over time they developed very differently in the two countries under study.

The late medieval belief in demonology arose from a combination of Arabic astral magic and Christian exorcism. It was practised by educated clerics who had access to books of astrology, church ritual and the necessary command of Latin and literacy to understand them. This description shaped the role of the wizard. The earliest legendary wizards, Sæmundur the Wise and Master Michael Scot, had earned reputations for their learning. They certainly would have possessed the necessary skills, although they may not have actually practised demonology. They were probably first accused by political opponents of having sold their souls to the Devil. Similar accusations had arisen in the eleventh and twelfth centuries about other scholars such as Gerbert of Aurillac, and legends had begun to circulate about powerful wizards who could summon and command the Devil. These legends became attached to their names and added to their growing reputations.

Many of the wizards in Icelandic legends were priests. This could have been a result of the association between clerics and demonology, but it may also have been influenced

by expectations concerning the role of priests in late medieval society. The clergy were often outsiders appointed to a parish. They possessed special knowledge which allowed them to act as mediators between the community and supernatural forces. They also acted within the community by punishing unaccepted behaviour and enforcing social norms. They may have been especially active in detecting thieves, a practice which Keith Thomas suggests died out with the Reformation and the abolition of auricular confessions. Similar traditions of wizard priests also appeared in Norway and in the South of England where cunning parsons were believed to be able to exorcise ghosts.

This belief in the magical function of priests may date back to the conversion to Christianity. Early Christian missionaries to Iceland, principally from Norway and England, claimed to be able to drive out elves and trolls, which they often identified as demons. At roughly this same time legends were beginning to circulate about clerics who could summon and command the Devil. Although the church formally condemned these practices the conditions were right for the newly converted laymen to interpret them as a form of Christian magic replacing the old pagan beliefs.

Motifs which were associated with demonology first appeared in Icelandic sources in the thirteenth century, but these were adapted to conform to traditional beliefs. The earliest account concerning Sæmundur the Wise recorded in Jóns Saga is clearly derived from the same tradition which produced the legend about Gerbert. The episode in which Sæmundur summoned the Devil to carry him to Iceland may have been deliberately omitted. Later sources suggest that it was once part of the full legend. By the seventeenth century this legend had been combined with variants of ML 3000: "Escape from the Black School". The book of magic in Jóns Þáttur Byskups Halldórssonar summoned a storm, not devils as did the one in the account concerning Pope Gregory VII, or

the Book of Consecrations described by Michael Scot about this same time. In variants of ML 3020: "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book" recorded in the nineteenth century concerning the Rev. Eiríkur the book summons imps or *púkar*. Earl Hakon's *sending* in Ólafssaga Tryggvasonar was not identified as a demon, but this account could have been influenced by accounts of demonology. The first recorded description of a *sendings* as a ghost is from the seventeenth century.

In Iceland legends concerning demonic magic were most often told about the early wizards, Sæmundur the Wise, Kálfur Árnason and the Rev. Hálfðan. In legends about wizards from the seventeenth century the Devil is much less prominent. This may have been a deliberate response to the diabolization of magic during the witchcraft trials, as in Jón Eggertssons treatment of the legend of Hálfðan and the stockfish. Jón had himself been accused of magic and he may have been hesitant about relating accounts of demonic magic. In another legend from this period Sæmundur's friend, Jón, raised a ghost in order to obtain its book of magic. This legend has parallels from the fifteenth century in France where a cleric was charged with having summoned a demon by reading from a book. The demon was said to have disappeared when a witness panicked and threw a shoe at it. The practice of raising ghosts had a long history in Icelandic popular beliefs. In *seiðr* spirits were raised and consulted concerning the future. These were not identified as ghosts, but in Norse mythology the god Óðinn was said to have raised the spirit of a dead prophetess to make predictions.

In some of the later legends elves appear as either the source of the wizards magic or the hostile forces which must be mediated with. Generally in Scotland and elsewhere elves are more often associated with witchcraft than with the wizard legends. A few of these wizards bear similarities to witches. Þorleifur Þorðursson was said to have to have

learned his magic in a variant of ML 5070: "Midwife to the Fairies". These wizards also resemble witches in that they are not associated with education nor with books of magic. In legends concerning ghosts and elves it is possible that the wizards have taken on some of the characteristics of the *seið*-women whom they may have partly replaced. Without sources earlier than the seventeenth century it is impossible to determine when elves and ghosts may have entered the wizard tradition, but with only one exception they do not appear in any of the legends recorded in the seventeenth century.

In Scotland the wizard tradition developed very differently. References associating Michael Scot with demonology had appeared in Italian sources from the fourteenth century. A number of prominent, politically motivated trials, which had taken place at the beginning of that century, may have helped to promote the belief in demonology. It is impossible to say when Michael Scot's reputation as a wizard reached Scotland, but the other two legendary wizards from the Lowlands, the Lords Soulis and Yester, were based on individuals who also lived in the thirteenth century. It seems probable that their legends first developed within a century of their deaths.

The earliest recorded references to Michael Scot, or any other wizard, in Scottish sources are from the sixteenth century. This is at the same time that the witchcraft trials were beginning in Scotland and the legends about the wizard Faust were developing in Germany. Both Leland and Camden identified Scot as a wizard at this time. No legends were recorded, but Theophilus Folgenius claimed that Scot could summon demons and ride an enchanted horse. Accounts of wizards riding demons disguised as horses had been recorded a century earlier. These could be regarded as variants of ML 3025: "Carried by the Devil", the most popular legend associated with Michael Scot. In the seventeenth century

Thomas Dempster claimed that Scot's books could summon fiends. Scot had himself described such a book in his Liber Introductorius and this may have been a source for ML 3020: "Inexperienced Use of the Black Book".

As in Iceland once the wizard tradition was established in Scotland it drew motifs from other sources. Two legends recorded concerning the origin of Michael Scot's magic were related to Welsh and Irish legends from the twelfth century concerning Merlin and Finn, the latter of these concerning Michael Scot and the white snake has several international parallels. Both of these characters were principally identified as prophets or seers. However in either legend Scot was explicitly said to be able to command the Devil.

The most common type of legend about Michael Scot concerns the formation of some locally prominent landmark. In the Highlands and Islands similar legends were told about supernatural creatures such as *cailleachan* or *trows*. These legends were always set in the distant past and Michael Scot was portrayed as a semi-mythical being. The effects of his actions are still locally evident, but the magic which he performed may not have been considered relevant to the time when the legends were told.

On the Welsh borders similar legends were told about Jacky Kent, who may have lived in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Other legends told about Jacky, which involve fairies rather than the Devil, were also recorded in the Scottish Highlands about Donald Duival MacKay. Unlike some of the latter Icelandic wizards neither Jacky nor Donald Duival were said to have learned their magic from the fairies, and Donald was said to have attended the Black School. Similar legends were also told in the North of England about Michael Scot. These legends would seem to form a single tradition area extending from the Welsh border to the North of Scotland. This tradition may be related to the legends concerning the cunning parsons from the South of

England, but in Scotland there was no apparent association between magic and the clergy.

In both Scotland and Iceland from the seventeenth century onwards there was a change in the wizard legends. Just as the trials of the fourteenth century had helped to popularize demonology the witchcraft trials of this period promoted the belief in demonic magic. The majority of wizards in either country are based on individuals who lived around the seventeenth century. In Iceland the earliest collections of wizard legends were compiled at this time. However the trials also presented an alternative model to explain magic, in the form of demonolatry, which served to diabolize the role of the wizard. In Iceland from the end of this century there is growing awareness of the conflict between magic and the church. Fewer of the wizards from the eighteenth century were priests, and more evil wizards began to appear.

The witchcraft trials had a more direct effect on the wizard legends in Scotland. As in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries many of the Highland wizards were first accused of having made a pact with the Devil during the religious wars of the seventeenth century. These accusations were inspired by prominent trials for witchcraft, such as those of the Earl of Bothwell and the Earl of Gowrie. The practice of educating the sons of Highland lairds in the Lowlands may also have been a factor in establishing the reputations of the Highland wizards, especially as the Lowlands were a major centre of the witchcraft trials at this time. The legends then told about these wizards were similar to those told about the German wizard Faust, and may represent a continental influence on the Scottish wizard tradition. Although the magic which they performed was generally condemned the wizards were presented as largely ambiguous figures. In one account Cameron of Locheil rescued his serving maid from the Devil. However in another legend

MacDonald of Keppoch avenged a lack of hospitality by causing a woman to dance herself to death. This legend was also told in the Lowlands about Michael Scot.

Throughout the history of the wizard legends their development was roughly contemporary with the development of the witchcraft trials. The earliest accounts concerning wizards such as Gerbert of Aurillac arose from the late medieval belief in demonology. Around the thirteenth century these legends influenced the reputations of Sæmundur the Wise and Master Michael Scot. These men were both educated clerics, and, like Gerbert, they may have been accused of having made a pact with the Devil. The belief in demonology was further promoted by a number of prominent trials in the fourteenth century. These trials eventually led to the witchcraft persecutions which reached Scotland and Iceland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At roughly this time the wizard tradition reached the height of its popularity.

Both the increased interest in magic in the seventeenth century and its diabolization have generally been associated with the Reformation. It has been argued that when the church ceased to perform exorcisms and blessings cunning men and wise women took over these practices. However, this study has shown that the witchcraft trials were likely to have been a greater factor in the spread and development of the wizard legends. Many of the wizard priests in Iceland, such as the Rev. Hálfðan and the Rev. Eiríkur are based on individuals who lived in the post-Reformation period, and the majority of the evil wizards did not appear until the eighteenth century. In Scotland many of the Highland wizards first gained their reputations during the period of the witchcraft trials.

Despite these changes all of these legends continued to be told at least into the nineteenth century when they were recorded. This may have created a sense of inconsistency

which is expressed in Loftur's comment, recorded in the nineteenth century, that the Black School had closed. While many of the Scottish wizards were said to have studied at the Black School in Iceland this legend was only told about Sæmundur the Wise. As with Sæmundur many of the legends told about Michael Scot were set in the distant past, and they may not have been considered relevant to the time when they were told. Often these legends have a fanciful element. In one legend he was said to have journeyed to France to recover the eleven days stolen during the change to a new calendar.

The enduring popularity of the wizard tradition is best expressed in the legends of the wizard's death. These legends concern the wizards hope for eventual salvation, and the fact that they were told acknowledged that there was some room for doubt in the matter. Most, but not all, of the wizards achieved salvation, although not without some difficulty. Michael Scot, among others, was said to have repented his use of magic before he died. In this way the legend could both confirm the happy conclusion of a popular figure and condemn the magic which he practised.

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Appendix 1:
The Legend of Michael Scot
published in Shadow #9 (1992)

"The wondrous Michael Scot", as Sir Walter Scott once called him (1805: 51), has been a popular and influential figure in the folklore of the Scottish Borders, but his fame has spread much further than that. As astrologer to the court of Emperor Frederick II, Master Michael Scot (not Scott) attracted a reputation as one of the leading scholars of the thirteenth century. This reputation soon came to include accusations of having engaged in magical experiments. These accusations were built upon, drawing from local and international sources, to create a legend which has been recorded in the Scottish Borders where he was born, the Highlands, the north of England, and Italy where he died.

Unfortunately his popularity has waned in the twentieth century and few of the tales once told about him have been recorded from any oral source. An attempt to map the distribution of these tales reflects only the principal areas where collectors have been most active and tells us little about the legend itself. We are forced to rely on literary sources and, in the Scottish Lowlands, some information can be gleaned from the occurrence of place names in the tales. From these sources, combined with the recorded tales, a fairly complete picture can be drawn both of the spread and development of the legend and of its influence on the literature of Scotland and Italy.

Master Michael Scot was born some time in the middle of the twelfth century. Nothing is known about his early life. Tradition has identified him as the baron of Balwearie, but this is not possible as the Scott family did not take possession of those lands until the end of the twelfth century. From the writings of Sir Walter Scott and James Hogg, who both identify Michael Scot as the knight who was sent to fetch the Maid of Norway (Scott 1805: 244), it seems that legend has confused Master Michael with a Sir Michael Scott who lived half a century later (Brown 1879: 5). Similarly, the tradition which connects him with Aikwood Tower near Selkirk is likely based on another Michael Scott who may have built that tower in the sixteenth century.¹

Another tradition associates the wizard Michael Scot with Ardrossan Castle. A tale from this tradition told in Cunningham (Mitchell and Dickie 1839: 288-90) tells how a merchant from Dumbarton was shipwrecked on a desert island. He was found by a mermaid who brought him food as well as gold, silver and jewels. After a year a ship arrived and agreed to take the merchant and his wealth to shore without the mermaids knowledge. The mermaid, finding the merchant gone, swam after the ship and demanded him back but the captain stalled her by having her count hoops until they reached shore in Gourock. The merchant then agreed to meet the mermaid on the island after a year and a day. When the time came the mermaid on the island gave the merchant their

son and a book. She instructed the merchant not to let the boy see the book until he was old enough to read it; then he would be able to do whatever he wanted with it including command the Devil. This boy was Michael Scot. In other traditions Scot is usually portrayed as an entirely human character, and this tale has also been told about Merlin. (Leyden 1801: 197)

His education has been associated with Oxford University (Brown 1897: 12). However this too, may be an element of folklore. Throughout at least the west counties, and perhaps much of England, Oxford graduates had a reputation as great conjurors and were much preferred over Cambridge graduates for dispelling ghosts (Brown 1979: 50). It's possible that this reputation has influenced the legend surrounding the great wizard. At any rate, the tradition connecting Michael Scot with Oxford must be regarded as unprovable. In the Highlands tradition has claimed that Scot gained his knowledge by tasting the broth made by boiling a white serpent (AT 673 *The White Serpent's Flesh*; Dempster 1888: 231). This legend has been told in full concerning Farchar Leech, Olladh Ileach (Campbell 1983 [1860]: 377-387) and Sir James Ramsay (Chambers [1870]: 77-80), all noted physicians, and this may indicate some connection between Michael Scot and medical knowledge.

The first known date in Michael Scot's life is 1217 in Toledo when he translated certain Arabic astrological writings into Latin (Thorndike 1965: 22). He continued translating works from Arabic Hebrew and possibly Greek, and wrote extensively on a number of subjects including physics, meteorology, medicine, sociology, psychology (concerning people's characters), physiognomy and alchemy, all from an astrological bias.

Michael Scot took service with the Emperor Frederick II some time between 1220 and 1227. From 1224 to 1227 there had been several papal attempts to find Scot a benefice. He was offered the archbishopric of Cashels in Ireland, but refused it on the grounds that he could not speak Irish and would not serve in absentia. These attempts ceased in 1227 when Frederick II was excommunicated. He was freed from excommunication in 1230 having gone on crusade and negotiated the partial possession of Jerusalem. He was excommunicated again in 1239 but by this time Michael Scot was dead (Thorndike 1965: 32-3). Henry of Avranches, a Norman poet attached to the imperial court, described Michael Scot as having died in the Emperor's service in a poem written in 1235 or 1236 (Thorndike 1965: 38-9). He never returned to Scotland.

Accusations of having engaged in magical experiments began soon after Michael Scot's death. There is no evidence to support these accusations. It is more likely that his association with Frederick II during his period of excommunication had served to blacken Scot's character. His connections with Arabic and Hebrew learning would also have helped to raise suspicions. Communication between the

Christian and Arabic worlds had been made possible by the rise of the universities in the twelfth century which had broken the church's monopoly on education. One result of this communication was the emergence of a new conception of magic derived from both Christian exorcism and Egyptian demonology (Kieckhefer 1989: ch.6).

Michael Scot was familiar with this new tradition of magic. In the prologue to his *Liber Introductorius* he lists several famous magicians and their books of magic including one called *The Book of Consecrations from Certain Experiments*. When this book is opened the voices of those in whose names it was consecrated are heard demanding work (Thorndike 1965: 120). Thomas Dempster (1627: 495) claimed that during his youth in Scotland at the beginning of the seventeenth century Michael Scot's books were still in existence, but that they could not be opened without summoning fiends. (This appears in the motif index as D1421.1.3 *Magic book summons genie*.)

The magic which Michael Scot practices in the legends is demonology. For example the Munich Handbook, a collection of demonic spells from the fifteenth century, describes how a magician is to summon the Devil in the form of a horse to carry him wherever he wishes to go. It further warns him not to make the sign of the cross while on horseback or else the blessing would banish the Devil. (Kieckhefer 1989: 6, 197). In variants of ML 3025 *Carried by the Devil* Michael Scot summons the Devil in this form. In these tales the Devil tries to trick him into saying the name of the lord, but Scot only responds "Ride on" or "Mount Devil and fly".

In one of these variants Michael Scot has been sent on embassy to the King of France to obtain compensation for acts of piracy committed against Scottish subjects. At first the King refuses the request, but Scot asks to have his horse (the Devil) stamp his hoof three times. The first stamp shakes all of the steeples in Paris making the bells ring. The second stamp brings down three towers of the palace. The King grants all of Michael Scot's requests before the horse can stamp a third time (Scott 1805: 249). Another variant of this tale from Cunningham has Scott sent to Rome to have the "Pow Sillar" removed ("Poll Silver", apparently an ecclesiastical tax). This variant follows much the same outline as the first. The Devil nickers three times. The first nicker shakes city hall. The second causes all the chimney pots to fall. The Pope agrees before the third nicker (Mitchell and Dickie 1839: 290). A third variant told in Islay has Scot go to France to recover the eleven days lost in the change from the old calendar. His horse destroys the first town the Scot comes to, but the second town agrees to give up the missing days (Banks 1939: 2.141).

The second variant from the Lowlands which has Michael Scot travel to Rome is interesting in that it shows a possible connection with the Highland variant of this tale. In this variant Michael Scot has been sent to Rome to learn the date of Shrovetide.² The Devil carries Scot so high that

he collects snow of his cap and shoulders. On reaching Rome in the early morning Scot banishes the Devil and calls on the Pope. At first the Pope is angry at having been woken up and points to the snow on Michael Scot's cap and says "You rode high, Michael." Scot points out that in his haste to dress the Pope has put a lady's slipper on one foot. They both agree to keep the other's secret and the Pope gives Scot the secret of how to calculate the date of Shrovetide (Campbell 1900: 296). A final variant of this tale recorded in Kilchrenan has Scot gain the secret by courting the Pope's daughter (Banks 1939: 1.1); unfortunately this variant is not given in full.

The conclusion to the Highland variant of the tale is especially interesting in its similarity to a tale in the *Decameron* (Boccaccio tr. Aldington 1957: 550-2). In the second tale of the ninth day an abbess is woken up in the middle of the night to catch one of her nuns who is sleeping with a man. Before the abbess can decide on a punishment the guilty nun points out that in her haste to get dressed the abbess had put a man's pants on her head instead of her veil proving that she, too, had been with a man that night. The similarity of this tale with the Highland Scottish variant of ML 3025 could be coincidental except that two versions of the Boccaccio tale have been recorded in Iceland (Arnason 1954: 78) demonstrating that this is a migratory legend. No AT or ML number has been assigned to this tale; however the motif K1273 *Abbess puts priest's trousers on her head* appears in the *Motif Index of Folk Literature*.

Boccaccio refers directly to Michael Scot in another tale, the ninth tale of the eighth night (1957: 519). In this tale he is presented as a master of black magic who uses his abilities to assist gentlemen of rank in love affairs and other matters. While Michael Scot does not personally appear in this tale it is clear that Boccaccio expected his name to be recognised by the readers. Scot was apparently well known in Italy in the fourteenth century. He appears in *Chiosa Sopra Dante* (1375), *Paradiso Degli Alberti* (1384-8) and *Dante col Comento di Jacopo della Lana* (1321-33) as a Faustian character using his magic to entertain at feasts or for his own purposes.³ In the last mentioned source Jacopo della Lana relates how Michael Scot once fooled a dinner party into thinking that their noses were bunches of grapes so that they almost cut them off. This tale was later recorded in the sixteenth century about Faust himself (Palmer and More 1966: 123).

The closest connection between the Scottish and Italian traditions can be found in a tale recorded by Charles Godwin Leland in the late nineteenth century by an old woman whom he identifies only as Maddalena (Brown 1897: 225-8). In this tale the wizard Mengot Scotto uses his magic to reveal a woman's infidelity to her husband. The woman revenges herself by hiring a witch who turns Mengot into a hare and sets his own dogs after him. Mengot retaliates by turning the witch into a skinless cat. This closely resembles a tale told in the

Scottish Lowlands by both Sir Walter Scott (1820: 184-5) and James Hogg (1813: 340-2). Scott identifies the witch as the witch of Falsehope. Hogg leaves her unnamed but claims that scot's servant was called Fauldshope. In this tale Michael decides to test his skill against the witch. She turns him into a hare and he is forced to take refuge from his dogs in his own sewer. The Italian variant has him dive into a magic pool set aside for that purpose. In the Scottish variants he retaliates by casting a spell forcing every one in the witch's home to continue dancing until, in Hogg's version, she dies from the exertion.

Sir Walter Scott originally offered only an abbreviated version of this tale in his appendix to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805: 250). James Hogg referring to this tale mentions that "Sir Walter Scott has preserved it, but so altered from the original way, that it is not easy to recognize it" (1813: 340). Scott revised his appendix with the publication of his collected poems, including the entire legend. He admitted that "this tale was told with less particularity in former editions, and I have been censured for inaccuracy in doing so" (1820: 186).

The motifs D123 *Transformation: man to hare* and D2061.1.2 *Persons magically caused to dance selves to death* both occur in the motif index. The Falsehope legend cannot be found in any index of tale-types. It could be assigned a number close to ML 3055 *The Witch that was Hurt* which it resembles, possibly *ML 3057 *Falsehope: Witch transforms magician into hare. Magician is chased by own dogs and forced to hide in body of water. Magician retaliates*. Both James Hogg and Maddalena recount variants on ML 3055 along with the Falsehope legend. The second half of the Scottish variant, using motif D2061.1.2, also occurs in Scotland as a separate tale. It has not been assigned a tale-type number.

Some of the motifs from the Falsehope legend occur in James Hogg's *The Three Perils of Man* (1972 [1822]: 149). In chapters XV and XVI Hogg presents Michael Scot, with the aid of three familiar spirits, dividing the Eildon hill in three. According to tradition Scot had ordered the Devil to divide the hill in a single night. When he succeeded Scot ordered him to dam the Tweed. The Devil first escaped down the river using his shovel as a boat and steering with his tail. Michael Scot followed him until a raven reminded Scot that he could only command the Devil while on dry land. He then forced the Devil to build the dyke at Mackerstown. Finally Scot commanded the Devil to spin ropes of sand, a task which the Devil could not accomplish.⁴

Sir Walter Scott refers to this tale in brief (1805: 251) and mentions that "in the south of Scotland, any work of great labour and antiquity, is ascribed, either to the agency of *Auld Michael*,...or of the Devil" (1805: 245). The prevalence of such legends, including the relevant place names, gives us a glimpse at the distribution of the Michael Scot Legend, at least in the Lowlands and in the North of England. In Ayrshire Scot is said to have ordered the Devil

to lay a road through the Cunninghamhead moss (Mitchell and Dickie 1839: 290). In many places in England Watling street is known as Mitchell Scot's causeway (Ure 1793: 133) and Roman works have also been attributed to Scot in Stirlingshire (Nimmo 1777: 82) and a road in Fife (Blair 1857: 118). The Deil's Dyke in Cumbria was meant to be the first part of a bridge which the Devil began building under Michael Scot's instruction when a stranger passed by and happened to bless the work in progress, thus halting it (Mitchell and Dickie 1839: 291). A similar tale is told about an aborted bridge across the Moray Firth (Swire 1963: 116). Finally Scot attempted to bring the tide to Morpeth. He had an assistant run along the Wansbeck from Cambois with the water following him. Unfortunately the man looked back over his shoulder, against his instructions, and the tide receded. The same thing happened when Scot attempted to make the Wear navigable to Durham (Denham ed. Hardy 1895: 118).

The motif H1021.1 *Task: making ropes of sand* occurs in the tale-types AT 1174 *Making a Rope of Sand* and ML 3020 *Misuse of the Black Book*. The latter tale has been recorded in the Scottish Highlands concerning another wizard, Donald Duival MacKay (Dempster 1888: 153). In this tale Donald's servant opens a book of magic releasing hundreds of little men. The servant sets them to spinning ropes of sand until Donald returns and dispels them. It is tempting to believe that this tale was once told in the Lowlands about Michael Scot, especially as Scot has been associated with a book of Might and James Hogg portrays him with three familiar spirits who demand to be given work. However the motif H1021.1 has also been found in England in connection with E454 *Ghost laid by being given impossible task* (Brown 1979: 42) and the Michael Scot legend may have borrowed from this tradition. Another legend from the Lowlands relates how Michael Scot once sold his soul to the Devil for a bonnet full of gold. Unknown to the Devil there was a hole in Scot's bonnet and he laid it over an open entrance to a coal mine. The Devil was unable to fill the bonnet so Michael Scot got both the gold and his soul (Mitchell and Dickie 1839: 290). This legend resembles a number of tales in the tale-type index 1170-1199 *A Man Sells his Soul to the Devil*, but no type number has been assigned to this particular tale.

The legend concerning Michael's escape from the Devil's Black School of magic is more readily identifiable as an international tale-type. This variant of ML 3000 has the Devil seize Michael Scot's shadow thinking that it is the last student to leave the school. Michael Scot escapes, but forever after he casts no shadow (Robertson 1961: 113). This tale was widely known throughout Scotland. It has been recorded in Sutherlandshire concerning Donald Duival Mackay (Dempster 1888: 152) and elsewhere variants have been told concerning Sir Robert Gordon (Briggs 1971: 132), Cameron of Locheil, MacDonald of Keppoch and MacKenzie of Brahan (Campbell 1900: 285). All of these variants share the motif F1038.1 *Student of Black School loses shadow*. The lack of a

shadow is a characteristic feature of magicians (Mauss 1972: 27) and this motif occurs in other migratory tales, for example AT 755 *Sin and Grace*. If a person's shadow can be equated with their soul then this motif takes on a darker meaning; however it is more likely that it was primarily intended to demonstrate the supernormality of the magician.

In his appendix to *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* Sir Walter Scott discusses Schools of magic (1805: 246); however he does not mention ML 3000 *Escape from the Black School*. It is possible that this tale was not part of Lowland tradition. The final tale which Sir Walter Scott does relate concerns Michael Scot's death. In this Michael Scot confides to his wife (or concubine) that he could be poisoned with the broth made from the meat of a breme sow.⁵ She feeds him such a broth, but he lives long enough to have her put to death (Scott 1805: 250). Another version of this tale from Northumbria has Scot poisoned by eating the boiled flesh of the sow, and he manages to save himself by drinking the water it had been cooked in (Denham ed. Hardy 1895: 119).

Another more elaborate tale concerning Michael Scot's death has been recorded in the Highlands. This tale can be divided into two chapters, both of which sometimes occur separately. The first part follows closely the tale-type AT 756B *The Devil's Contract*. In this a young man who has lost his soul to the Devil goes to Hell to get it back. While there he sees the bed prepared for Michael Scot. Upon returning to the world he tells Scot of the fate that is awaiting him and Scot repents.⁶ In the second part of the tale Michael Scot gives instructions that after his death his body is to be left upon a hillock, or in some versions a church steeple. He predicts that three raven and three doves will fly towards him. If the doves reach him first then he is to be given a Christian burial, but if the ravens are first then his body is to be burnt. Everything happens as he predicted. The ravens fly much faster than the doves, but in their haste they fly past Michael Scot and the doves reach him first. (Campbell 1900: 288).

These two episodes have been recorded about other individuals as well, both as separate tales or in combination. The complete tale has only been found in Scotland, in Ireland and in Brittany and appears to be a distinctly Celtic oikotype of AT 756B (MacDonald 1972: 19). The motif E756.3 *Raven and dove fight over man's soul* occurs in the motif index; however the motif of a man making a deathbed prediction regarding his salvation or damnation does not. (This motif also occurs in several Icelandic tales concerning wizards.) It could be assigned the number *M303 *Deathbed prophecy concerning individual's salvation or damnation*, or regarded as a variation of M302 *Prophets: means of learning the future*.

A third account of Michael Scot's death involves another prophecy and brings us back to the thirteenth-century scholar and astrologer. Scot was said to have predicted that he would be killed by a stone of a specific size falling from

heaven and striking him on the head. In order to prevent this he designed and wore a metal cap called a cerebrierium or cereboterium. One day while attending mass in Melrose Abbey Michael Scot removed this helmet. A small stone then fell from the vault and struck him on the head. He weighed the stone and, finding it to be the right weight, he died (Scrimgeour-Jackson 1933: 83). This tale was first recorded by Francisco Pipini in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (Thorndike 1965: 39). Pipini does not mention Melrose Abbey. Unfortunately this tale has not been recorded from any oral source and it would be impossible to determine when it entered the Lowland tradition. Michael Scot's burial site has been associated with Melrose Abbey, and with two other Cistercian abbeys, Glenluce in Galloway and Holmcultram at Abbey Town in Cumberland (Brown 1897: 176).

Michael Scot the thirteenth century astrologer considered magic to be "the mistress of all iniquity and evil" (Thorndike 1965: 116). He would no doubt have considered it a curse that the rumours of magic experiments which began during his life have survived for so long after his death. Legends concerning his necromantic skill have arisen in both his native Scotland, and in Italy where he spent much of his adult life. The Italian tradition has followed the continental model of a Faustian Black sorcerer while in Scotland he is portrayed as a more neutral arch-wizard capable of outwitting the Devil. These two traditions have had some contact and have influenced each other as the Falsehope legend attests.

In the Lowlands of Scotland where the name Michael was apparently popular among the Scot family, local traditions have been shaped by associations with landmarks as well as by other persons of the same name. Migratory legends reflecting medieval beliefs in magic seem to have had more influence in the highlands. ML 3000 and ML 3020 have not been recorded in the Lowlands. While these two traditions appear quite separate the border between the Scottish Lowlands and the north of England seems less distinct.

The legends have been carried into literature by such authors as Boccaccio and Sir Walter Scott who have each preserved some part of the tales and shaped them to their own purposes. The poet Dante, in what may have been a political move, claims to have seen Michael Scot in the circle of diviners and sorcerers on his trip through the *Inferno* (canto XX, lines 115-7) but like the legend itself it may only have been Michael Scot's shadow.

NOTES

1. Galbraith (1991) draws attention to several early-sixteenth-century references to a Maister Michael Scott of Aikwood Tower in the Register of the Great Seal and in the Walter Mason Trust papers relating to Selkirk which are due to be published by the Stair

Society later this year (ed. Teresa Maley)

2. This legend occurs in Gaelic in audio recordings in the archive of the School of Scottish Studies from Archie Munro, South Uist (SA 1964/43 A7) and Ruairi MacPherson, Barra (SA 1970/350 A8).

3. Translations of passages about Scot in these sources are included in Brown 1897 at pages 210-14.

4. Cunningham 1974: 18. Cunningham's typescript includes material narrated by George Summers, huntsman to the Duke of Buccleuch.

5. John Leyden notes under "brym" in the glossary to his edition of *The Complaynt of Scotland* (1801: 315): "'The rankest poison in the world is the broth of a brode sow, a-breming;' Sc. proverb: i.e. a brood sow in season for the boar."

6. MacDonald 1977. This item in *Tocher* from Duncan MacDonald, South Uist, was drawn from the Gaelic Manuscript (1953-7) made by Duncan's son Donald J. MacDonald; the English translation is by Peggy Clements and Alan Bruford. The archive of the School of Scottish Studies contains a recording of this legend in Gaelic from Alick Williamson, Easter Ross (SA 1968/261 A4), and also a microfilm copy of a version recorded in 1933 by Donald MacDonald, Eriskay, from Duncan MacInnes, Eriskay, which has been published and translated by John MacInnes (1963).

Appendix 2:
Demonic Magic in the Icelandic Wizard Legends
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The word "wizard" in this paper refers to the Icelandic *galdrmen* as a separate class of magicians distinct from the pagan sorcerers of early medieval literature. The wizard legends represent a large body of Icelandic folk-tales and the magic practised in the legends reflects a wide range of beliefs, however, allowing for a few exceptions, some generalisations can be drawn. Many of the wizards are priests and the legends have a strong Christian element. Terms referring to old or pagan knowledge are reserved almost exclusively for the evil magicians.

This paper will be primarily concerned with the migratory legends. These are legends which have been recorded in roughly the same form in several different countries. For the purpose of this paper we will assume that the legends originated elsewhere and were imported into Iceland. This assumption is consistent with the orthodox Christian beliefs from the early Middle Ages. The influence of these beliefs is especially strong in the legends concerning the wizard/priest Saemund the Learned.

Saemund Sigfusson is the earliest of the Icelandic wizards. According to the annals he was born in the year 1056. He was educated in France and returned to Iceland in 1076 or 1078. Once home he erected a large church on his patrimony at Oddi in the south of Iceland and played an active role in both the ecclesiastical and political life of the country. He was instrumental in passing both the law of tithes and the ecclesiastical law of 1125. Through his efforts he helped to raise his family to a position of power and prestige which it was to enjoy for several generations (Hermansson 1932, 5-8).

Saemund is credited with having written a Latin *History of the Kings of Norway*, which has since been lost. If this was the case then he was the first history writer in Iceland. He was referred to as an authority by later medieval writers, and by the thirteenth century he was known as Saemund "the Learned", a term which implied knowledge of the literature and history of the ancient north and not of foreign learning (Hermansson 1932, 33-5). Saemund died on 22 May 1133 (Hermansson 1932, 9).

In the legends we find a very different character. Saemund is portrayed as a trickster who summons the Devil and bargains with his soul for small favours, then outwits him in order to avoid payment. He also acts as a mediator, using his wit and knowledge to rescue others from their contracts with the Devil. Throughout the legends Saemund is presented as an ambiguous character, one who uses diabolical means to do good against the forces of evil.

In order to understand how these legends arose we must first understand the Christian conception of magic in the early Middle Ages. Philosophers and theologians throughout

the early centuries of Christianity had increasingly regarded magic as essentially demonic, that is to say that it could only be performed through the aid of demons (Kieckhefer 1989,8-10). In the twelfth century this theory was elaborated upon with the introduction of astral magic. Astral magic was a branch of astrology where it was believed that the astral powers of stars which influenced events on earth could be manipulated through the use of astrological symbols (Kieckhefer 1989,131-2). The beliefs in astral magic had been imported into Europe from the Arab world. Initially the works of Arab writers had been available only in Spain and the south of Italy, but from the twelfth century onwards many of these works were translated into Latin and became available to scholars throughout Europe (Kieckhefer 1989,117-19).

The men who had access to these writing were the physicians and clerics. At this time the word cleric was loosely applied to anyone who had been ordained to the lower orders of the Church. One of these orders was that of exorcist, and, as part of the ordination, the candidate would receive a book of exorcisms containing the language and rituals needed to command demons. This formed another component of demonic magic. The men most often accused of practising demonic magic were the clergy, monks and friars. In many cases these accusations may have been inspired by envy at an individual's unusual success, but others may well have attempted to copy that success by selling their souls to the Devil (Kieckhefer 1989,153-6).

These are essentially the same elements that we find in the life of Saemund the Learned. He was a member of the clergy who was recognised as an expert in early (pagan) history. his education abroad would have included astrology, along with mathematics and theology. He would certainly have been aware of contemporary attitudes towards magic. His rise to a position of prominence could easily have been interpreted by envious rivals as evidence of his having worked magic with the aid of the Devil.

The connection between demonic magic and a formal education is especially relevant to Saemund's reputation as a wizard. In the seventeenth century, Arni Magnusson recorded a legend which claimed that Saemund had studied at the Black School. The term of study there was three years, at the end of which all of the students would leave on the same day and the Devil would claim the last as tuition fee for the rest. Saemund was the last more than once, so he was there longer than most. Finally Bishop Jon Ogmundsson learned where Saemund was. He visited Saemund and offered to help him out if Saemund would return to Iceland and promise to keep a Christian life. Saemund agreed and when next he tried to leave Jon walked behind him with his coat thrown loosely over his shoulders. As they passed out of the door the Devil grabbed Jon's coat, but he and Saemund escaped.

The Devil then made a deal with Saemund that if Saemund could hide from him for three nights then he could go free.

The first night Saemund hid in a riverbank and the Devil thought that he had drowned himself. The second night Saemund hid in the bottom of a boat floating at sea and the Devil thought that his body had been washed out to sea. The third night Saemund covered himself with consecrated earth and the Devil thought that his body had been found and buried in a churchyard where the Devil could not reach him (Arnason 1954,i,469-70).

Several variants of this legend were recorded in the nineteenth century. In one variant Saemund escaped by leaving his shadow behind. As Saemund was leaving the Devil seized his shadow thinking that it was another student. From then on Saemund never cast a shadow (Arnason 1954,i,475-6). This variant has been identified as a migratory legend, ML 3000: *Escape from the Black School*, by Reidar Th. Christiansen (Christiansen 1958,18). The seventeenth-century variant with Bishop Jon losing his coat was probably influenced by the migratory legend with Saemund losing his shadow, in both variants the association with the Black School and the Devil make it clear that Saemund gained his knowledge from demonic sources.

The earliest recorded Icelandic variant of this legend occurs in the *Saga of Saint Jon* (xv-xvi), composed in the early thirteenth century by the monk Gunnlaug Leifsson. In this account, Jon learned that Saemund was studying abroad and that he had forgotten everything from his past including his own Christian name. Jon visited Saemund and convinced him to return to Iceland, but Saemund's schoolmaster was unwilling to let him leave. Jon and Saemund fled, and the next night the schoolmaster set out after them by following Saemund's star. Saemund hid by filling his shoes with water. The schoolmaster saw water around Saemund's star and assumed that he had been drowned. The next night the schoolmaster set out again, but Saemund filled his shoes with blood and the schoolmaster assumed that he had been killed. The third night the schoolmaster saw that Saemund was still alive, but was too far away to be brought back. (Jonsson 1953,21-5).

The schoolmaster in this account is not identified as the Devil, and the science which he practices is astrology, not demonology. The motif of Saemund losing his shadow, or of Jon losing his coat, is entirely absent. None of the motifs which characterise the migratory legend are found in this account, which suggests that the migratory legend entered the tradition and influenced the legend of Saemund's education at a later date. These are the same motifs which link the legend with the medieval beliefs in demonic magic. It is possible that Gunnlaug simply omitted the more fantastic elements from the legend in order to give it greater credibility, but we cannot presume that the elements had formerly been present.

There is some evidence that the migratory legend and the account of Saemund hiding from the Devil were both derived from the same original source. In the tale-type AT 329: *Hiding from the Devil* the hero must hide three times. A

variant of this tale-type, AT 329A, is titled *Man gives (sells) his shadow to the Devil*. Unfortunately there is no summary of this tale-type given in the tale-type index (Aarne and Thompson 1961,120-1). If these two variants were originally derived from a longer international tale-type containing both of the motifs of hiding and losing one's shadow, then this may also be the source of the legend of Saemund's education. We do not know, however, when this tale-type may have existed, or what relation it may have to the Black School legend.

The earliest recorded variant of the Saemund legend is found in William of Malmesbury's *History of the Kings of England*, written in the early twelfth century. This variant concerns a scholar named Gerbert, who later became Pope Sylvester II. William recounts how Gerbert learned astrology and the arts of calling spirits from Hell from a Saracen in Spain. The Saracen had a book containing the knowledge of his whole art, which he refused to show to Gerbert. With the aid of the Saracen's daughter Gerbert stole the book and fled. The Saracen pursued him by following the direction of the stars, but Gerbert hid by hanging under a wooden bridge, touching neither earth nor water (Stephenson 1989,150-2).

Halldor Hermansson has suggested that Saemund first brought some variant of this legend to Iceland. Saemund was then made the hero of the tale and in that way gained his reputation as a wizard (Hermansson 1932,54). We can not know what other variants may have existed, but this account seems to be completely independent of the migratory legend. The Saracen is not identified as the Devil, although there is a reference to demonic magic. William of Malmesbury generally shows a high level of credulity towards his sources, and it seems unlikely that he would have omitted elements confirming Gerbert's association with the Devil.

William tells us that the next day Gerbert came to a sea coast. He then summoned the Devil and offered to sell him his soul if the Devil would transport him to the opposite coast (Stephenson 1989,152). William offers this bargain as an explanation for Gerbert's later successes in life. A similar tale was recorded in the nineteenth century concerning Saemund the Learned. After leaving the Black School Saemund went to Norway. There were two other Icelanders there and the king offered the parish at Oddi to whomever could get there first. Saemund went to the seashore and summoned the Devil, offering to sell him his soul if the Devil could carry him all the way to Iceland without getting his coat-tails wet. The Devil then changed himself into a seal and swam to Iceland with Saemund on his back while Saemund read from the psalter. Just before they reached land Saemund closed the book and hit the Devil over the head with it. The Devil sank down and Saemund swam to shore with his coat-tails wet (Arnason 1954,i,478).

Iceland did not come under the king of Norway until the middle of the thirteenth century and this variant cannot be any older than that. The fact that this legend is set just

after Saemund's escape from the Black School suggests that the two legends may once both have been part of a longer account following the same outline as the legend concerning Gerbert. This is further evidence that William of Malmesbury and Gunnlaug, who wrote Jon's saga, were both working with legends derived from the same source. The act of summoning the Devil in both these legends, along with references to astrology and education, shows that this early source had been shaped by beliefs in demonic magic.

In a similar legend, Saemund had promised to take his daughter, Margret, to the happiest place in the world on New Year's Eve. They went to the sea shore and Saemund summoned the Devil in the form of a grey horse. As they climbed on to the Devil's back Saemund warns Margret not to pray during the journey. The Devil started to run across the water. Three times he attempted to sink under the water and drown Saemund and Margret, but each time Saemund brings him under control by hitting him on the head with a book of prayers (Arnason 1954,i,485).

This legend is a variant of the migratory legend ML 3025: *Carried by the Devil* (Christiansen 1958,35). In Scottish and Norwegian variants of this legend the Devil always appears as a horse or as a man driving a horse. Some variants of this legend resemble ML 5005: *Journey with a troll*. In these variants the passenger says a short prayer during the journey and is immediately thrown to the ground. This motif may be derived from an episode in the *Arabian Nights*. On the fifteenth night a merchant tells how he once offered a prayer to Allah while in a magic boat and was thrown overboard (Mardrus and Mathers 1964,91-2). In some variants of ML 3025 this motif is expanded into a short dialogue in which the Devil tries to trick the passenger into saying the name of God so that the Devil would vanish and leave the passenger to drown or fall to his death.

In *Journey with a Troll* and some variants of *Carried by the Devil* the troll or Devil is encountered by chance. Only in the variants concerning wizards is the Devil summoned, and it is only in these variants that the short dialogue occurs. Both of these motifs are consistent with medieval beliefs in demonic magic. A fifteenth century demonologist's handbook, *The Munich Manuscript*, describes how a magician can summon the Devil in the form of a horse to carry the magician wherever he wants to go. The manuscript goes on to warn the magician not to make the sign of the cross while riding on horseback as the blessing will banish the demon (Kieckhefer 1989,6 and 197).

Another similar tale is found in the literature from the early middle ages. In the *Life of St Peter* it is told that Simon Magus once summoned invisible demons to carry him up into Heaven. St Peter said a prayer and Simon fell to his death. This tale is included in the *Legenda Aurea* compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth century (Palmer and More 1966,40). Earlier variants of this account do not mention demons, but merely state that Simon rose up and St

Peter's prayers brought him back down (Kieckhefer 1989,34). The *Legenda Aurea* remained popular until the sixteenth century and this tale would have been well known. A close variant was recorded in the sixteenth century concerning the sorcerer John Faust (Palmer and More 1966,101).

The legend of Simon Magus is not likely to be a variant of the migratory legend *Carried by the Devil*. In the Simon Magus legend the Devil does not appear as a horse. The magician's intention is to impress an audience, not to seek transportation to a specific location. Finally, the demons are banished not by accident, but deliberately through the prayers of a third person who remains on the ground. Similarly, the legend of Saemund's return to Iceland from the Black School differs from the migratory legend. The Devil appears as a seal, not as a horse, and the dialogue, or any similar motif, is absent. Saemund banishes the Devil intentionally at the end of the journey in order to cheat him of their bargain.

The legend of Saemund's return from the Black School was probably derived from the same source as the account in Jon's saga or the story of Gerbert. This source was not derived from the migratory legend which may have been introduced into Iceland at a later date. All of these legends, including the legend of Simon Magus, reflect similar beliefs, especially the belief that magic was performed through the aid of demons.

The motif of hitting the Devil over the head with a book does not occur elsewhere in Icelandic folklore, nor is it found in the *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (Thompson 1932), however it does appear in one source from early Icelandic literature. In the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* (lx) by the monk Odd Snorrason, there is an account where three trolls describe their attempts to destroy King Olaf. The third troll tells how he disguised himself as a woman in order to enter the king's bed-chamber, but at the last moment the king woke up and hit the troll over the head with a book (Jonsson 1957,143-4).

Throughout his saga King Olaf is portrayed as an evangelical Christian and the enemy of pagans and sorcerers. The pagan gods appear as incarnations of the Devil and Odd would certainly have equated the trolls with some form of demon. It is not possible to draw substantial conclusions from the use of a single motif, but a comparison with King Olaf may give us some clues to Saemund's character in the legends. Like King Olaf, Saemund's relationship with the Devil is antagonistic, and like the king Saemund uses Christian tools and symbols, such as the prayer book, as weapons against the Devil. Like the medieval demonologists, Saemund does not merely banish or exorcise the Devil, he commands him, and unlike King Olaf he is willing to use the Devil's own methods against him. This creates an essentially Christian character, but one which is far more ambiguous than the missionary king.

At various points in the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason* Odd

quotes from Saemund's lost *History of the Kings of Norway*, often without naming his source (Turville-Petre 1963,83). It is possible that the motif of hitting the Devil over the head with a book was originally taken from Saemund's history and was later applied to Saemund himself. The motif may then have been assimilated into the migratory legend from the earlier legend of Saemund's return to Iceland through analogy due to the similarities between the legends.

A third migratory legend occurring in the Icelandic wizard legends is not told about Saemund the Learned. ML 3020: *Inexperienced use of the Black Book* concerns the seventeenth-century clergyman, Eirik Magnusson. On one occasion the Reverend Magnusson had left his book of magic at home and he sent his apprentice back to fetch it. Eirik warned him not to open the book, but on the return trip, out of curiosity, the boy looked inside. Immediately he was surrounded by imps demanding work. The apprentice commanded them to weave ropes of sand, an impossible task, to keep them occupied until Eirik could be brought to exorcise them (Arnason 1954,i,545-6).

While the magic in this legend is not explicitly demonic, it is consistent with beliefs in demonic magic. In the thirteenth century an astrologer, Michael Scot, listed among other books of demonic magic the *Book of Consecrations from Certain Experiments*. When this book was opened Scot claimed that the spirits to whom it had been consecrated would be heard demanding work (Thorndike 1965,120). Variants of this legend have been recorded in Iceland in which imps appear when a box is opened rather than a book (Arnason 1954,iii,513-14). In Christiansen's summary of the Norwegian variants of the migratory legend the Devil is made to appear (Christiansen 1958,28). The imps, "pukar", in the Icelandic variants are often portrayed as demonic, but they could not be confused with a manifestation of the Devil.

One tale-teller claimed that the Eirik Magnusson had studied at the Black School, but that it had little influence on his magic (Arnason 1954,iii,499). The Devil does not appear in any of the legends concerning him. Two other wizards were said to have studied at the Black School along with Saemund the Learned, Kalf Arnason and Halfdan Einarson (Arnason,i,475). Only a few legends survive concerning Kalf Arnason. The Devil does not play a prominent role in the legends concerning Halfdan, who lived in the sixteenth century. He is more often portrayed in contact with ghosts and trolls, the traditional figures of Icelandic Folklore. This is consistent with the majority of Icelandic wizard legends.

While the belief in demonic magic does not appear to have persisted, it has influenced the legends concerning the later Icelandic wizards. Many of these wizards remain priests. They continue to play a role as mediators between the natural and the supernatural, protecting others and exorcising evil spirits. Books of magic remain a recurrent feature in the legends, as does the belief that magic

knowledge can be acquired through a formal education. All of these features were consistent with Icelandic culture. The term "fjolkunnigr", or much-knowing, was applied to magicians from pre-Christian times. In a largely literate society knowledge became easily associated with the written word, and often the most educated individual in a community was the clergyman.

The association between magic and the Devil does reappear in some of the later legends. This is especially true of the legend of Loft Thorsteinsson, an evil wizard from the eighteenth century. Although the Devil does not appear as a character in the legend, except as a grey hand which emerges from a lake and pulls Loft to his death, we are explicitly told that through his use of magic Loft has come under the Devil's power. This is probably an influence from the Icelandic witchcraft trials of the seventeenth century. Loft himself claims that if a wizard can learn enough, like Saemund the Learned, then he can command the Devil without losing his soul (Arnason 1954,i,573). This assertion was not consistent with orthodox Christian belief.

An anecdote which may reflect the orthodox belief concerns Saemund the Learned and Halfdan. Halfdan once followed Saemund from the Althing, the Icelandic parliament. When he caught up with Saemund Halfdan said, "You have an evil familiar, brother, a raven out of Niflheim, and now I mark you with his mark." He then struck Saemund on the cheek and eye and rode off. Saemund could never see well out of that eye again (Arnason,i,503). Niflheim was the Norse land of the dead. The reference to the ravens suggests a connection with Odin, the one-eyed god of magic, who had two ravens as servants. The pagan gods were often equated with the Devil in early Icelandic literature, and Halfdan's statement would seem to reflect Saemund's continued association with the Devil.

The practice of demonic magic has persisted in the legends concerning Saemund the Learned until their recording in the nineteenth century. It is not fair to regard these legends as mere survivals of earlier beliefs. That they continued to be told is evidence that the attitudes reflected in them remained relevant and that they continued to entertain their audience.

From the evidence in the *Saga of Saint Jon*, we know that Saemund had begun to acquire a reputation as a wizard as early as the thirteenth century. At this time orthodox Christian belief was that magic was performed through the aid of demons, and this belief has shaped Saemund's legend. The belief in demonic magic is more explicit in the migratory legends *Escape from the Black School* and *Carried by the Devil*. These legends may have been influenced by the same source as the account in Jon's saga or the story of Gerbert, but they appear to have entered the Icelandic wizard legends at a later date.

While Saemund may have served as a model for the later wizards, other beliefs and traditions have influenced the

Icelandic wizard legends. Only those features of medieval demonology which were consistent with Icelandic culture were retained. The witchcraft trials of the seventeenth century brought new attitudes concerning the role of the Devil in the practice of magic. These attitudes may have had some influence on Saemund's character, but they have not changed his basic role in the legends. He is a wizard who has learned enough of the Devil's own magic to command and outwit him on his own terms.